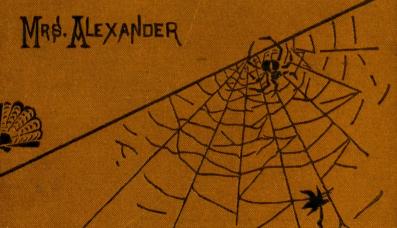


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# THE EXECUTOR

#### A NOVEL

BY

## MRS. ALEXANDER

AUTHOR OF "THE WOOING O'T," "WHICH SHALL IT BE?" ETC., ETC.



NEW YORK
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY
1883



# AUTHOR'S EDITION.



W. L. Mershon & Co.,

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# THE EXECUTOR.

#### CHAPTER I.

THE young ladies of the Misses Boaden's establishment, Elmwood House, Forest Hill, had dispersed for the hour of recreation permitted on summer evenings.

A couple strolled to and fro with linked arms in deepest conversation; one of somewhat heavy aspect sat under a lilac bush laboriously conning a lesson. The rest were playing croquet (lawn-tennis was in its infancy as yet) on a tolerably large space of grass in which the garden terminated, and which was mentioned in the Misses Boaden's prospectus as "The Grounds."

The players, however, were evidently knocking the balls about in a purposeless manner, and had not settled to a regular game, while a running fire of con-

jecture and question ran from mouth to mouth.

"Where is Stasie?"

"Isn't Stasie Verner coming?"
"Oh, she will not be long!"
"She is writing letters, I think."

"What a shame, when she promised to be my

partner!"

"Run, Dolly, and ask if she is coming."

"No, I won't! There she is looking out of the window: call to her."

Chorus—" Now you know Miss Amelia will not let

us shout."

Vigorous dumb show, waving of hands and beckoning, answered by a serious shake of the head, conveying decided refusal.

Stasie Verner-now kneeling before the window of

her bedroom, her elbows resting on the low sill, while she gazed dreamily out over the garden—a discontented, even sad look darkening her young face—was the leading spirit of the school: first, she was the eldest, except the pupil-teacher, Ella Mathews; secondly, she was of a bold and daring disposition, disposed to take full advantage of any superiority nature might have allotted her; thirdly, she had a remarkably sharp tongue; and finally, though her means were limited, she had a certain munificence of nature, that recommended her more to her companions than to her teachers.

A tap on the door roused her from her thoughts or dreams some minutes after she had shaken her head in token of refusing her schoolfellows' invitation; she rose slowly and stood still for a moment before uttering, not too amiably, "Come in." A tall and already developed figure, upright and well rounded, a careless stateliness (if such a contradiction can be combined) in her carriage and the pose of her head, a confusion of very fair disordered hair, and a face too pale perhaps, though the skin was soft and creamy, broad browed, and narrowing to a delicate chin, lit up by a pair of eyes, uncertain as to color, but dark compared to her hair and complexion, as were also the brows and lashes. Her expression was for the moment unmistakably impatient, not to say angry.

The door opened to admit a small slight girl, plain but pleasant looking, and exceedingly neat of aspect.

"Well! what is it, Ella? Am I never to have a minute's peace to think my own thoughts? I tell you I will not go out to play croquet or any thing else! it is too hot and too tiresome!" cried Stasie Verner.

"I have not come to ask you," returned the other calmly, as she closed the door and advanced into the room. "The postman has brought you this letter, and one to me. Will you permit me to stay and read it?" this with a tone of mock entreaty.

"A letter! Oh, thank you, dear! Even a letter is

a blessed break, though I have no correspondents I care for;" and she opened it with some eagerness, while her friend, drawing a chair to the window, proceeded to peruse hers, deliberately and atten-

tively.

"Come," said Stasie, her brow clearing, her eyes lighting up, "this is not so bad. It is an invitation from Mrs. Harding to go to them on Friday, and stay for a few days; they hope to have a box to see Jefferson (in *Rip Van Winkle*). Isn't that perfectly delicious? I know every word of the story, and I have so longed to see it acted."

"Yes, I am glad; I wish I could go, too!" with a

little sigh.

"So do I," cried Stasie heartily. "What can I wear, Ella? I have nothing fit to be seen, and I am sick of rusty black; I really must insist on buying some new

clothes while I am at the Hardings'."

Miss Mathews did not answer, and seemed absorbed in her letter. "What have you got?" asked Stasie, squeezing herself on to the same chair with her friend. "Nothing very good," she returned slowly, folding up her letter; "I am afraid Bob has been getting into some scrape again, though mother does not exactly say so, and she has not been very well herself, poor dear! The vicar has been asking about me; it seems he knows an old lady who wants an accomplished young one as companion, etc., etc. Alas! my accomplishments are few and far between."

"But, Ella, you must not leave while I am here. Why, what would become of me? I should either mope to death, or quarrel with every creature, and be

expelled as a nuisance!"

"There is many a slip," quoted Ella, "and I fear there is no such good luck as an engagement in store for me, though I am fitter for some such nondescript employment than to teach."

"You can teach very well, if you only knew the things to teach," said Stasie reflectively. "How I

wish they would let me go back and live with your mother, Ella! Yours is the only home I ever knew! and then I might be a help, for I know I have some money—perhaps not much, but something I can call my own."

"Not till you are one-and-twenty. You may be sure Mr. Harding and the other executor will keep you tight

enough while they can."

"I am not sure of any thing," returned Stasie impatiently; "Mr. Harding is always so pleasant and goodnatured when I am with him that I think he will do every thing I want; and yet I never advance a step towards emancipation. Why, next month I shall be eighteen! and I have seen nothing—I know nothing. I can't help being a big baby! It would be almost better to have been shut up in a convent; there is some sort of romance, something distingué, about such seclusion; but a second-rate school in Forest Hill, with Saturday afternoons at the Crystal Palace, is the very essence of commonplace."

"But, Stasie, you are really not so badly informed,

as girls go."

"Bah! I am utterly ignorant; and I should be ignorant if I had taken honors in every University Exam. Can books teach me how to talk? how to eat, sit, stand, and comport myself like people in society? I shall never forget the only day I spent at my guardian's house. Every thing was so strange, I felt afraid to speak; I could not shape my sentences in the light, droll, pleasant way the rest spoke. I was afraid to choose any of the dishes that were offered at luncheon, lest I should make a mistake in the manner of eating them. I felt stiff and awkward when I moved compared to the quiet easy manners of the other ladies; and though Lady Elizabeth was very kind, she altered her tone in some indefinable way whenever she addressed me, as if I were a half-reclaimed savage, to be dealt with carefully and indulgently. Oh, I cannot tell you the curious dread and longing I have to try

another plunge into a life so different from all I have

known, and yet-" she stopped abruptly.

"I think, Stasie, you are too ambitious and discontented," said her friend gravely. "Just think what it is to be certain of one's future—to have enough; I don't mean for the pleasure of being idle, but to be sure of food and raiment and lodging, and be free to work at what you like best, without anxiety about any one."

"That's just it!" cried Stasie, jumping up to walk to and fro. "I have no one in the world to care about, which is as bad as having no one to care for

me."

"No one, Stasie?" a little reproachfully.

"I do love you, Ella, and I am fond of your dear mother; but then I do not belong to you nor you to me; yet I would rather go and live with you—your people, I mean—at Islington, dull and slow as it is, than stay here or anywhere. Still I like some of the lessons very much, though I am not what you call intellectual. At any rate, I am sick of being shut up, and I intend to make a strong effort to escape when the other executor comes to England, and he must be here soon. He will help me, I am sure."

"I hope so. Now, had you not better sit down and answer Mrs. Harding's invitation, while I write a line

to my mother?"

"I will, but there is plenty of time before prayers."

Nevertheless Miss Verner began to clear away the looking-glass from her small dressing table, setting forth upon it a shabby little writing-case and much besprinkled ink-bottle, and applied herself to the com-

position of a somewhat gushing acceptance.

Stasie, or according to her high-flown baptismal name, Anastasia Verner, was the daughter of a well-born but exceedingly unsuccessful younger son, who, after many follies and failures, had made a love-match, and dying, left his widow an empty exchequer, a formidable amount of small debts, and a pretty fair-haired baby girl. The poor young mother was brave, self helpful, and utterly devoted to her child, but her strength was undermined by grief and anxiety, and so overweighted

in the struggle for existence.

Accident threw her into an evangelical circle, through the kind notice of the clergyman whose church she attended, and whose assistance she asked in her search for pupils. At the parsonage she met an elderly Syrian gentleman, who was for the time being a prime favorite with the Exeter Hall faction, and had brought a parcel and an introductory letter from a gifted missionary, then working amid the Jews scattered throughout Turkish Arabia, to the busy incumbent of an obscure north-west district. But neither time, nor scorching heat, nor money making, nor consular cares (Christian Kharapet, Esq., as he loved to call himself, was British Consul at Mardin, a town that had lately come into notice because of the mighty ruins discovered in its vicinity)—none of these had so exhausted his system or dulled his sight as to render him regardless or indifferent to the pensive delicate grace of the young widow. His fancy was pleased, and although she had neither money nor position, she stood well with many influential members of the party that petted and pushed him on the road to fortune. He felt he should do himself no harm by a disinterested marriage; so he offered a safe home, and promised kindly companionship to the widow, and further baited his hook by undertaking to settle on her precious little daughter a sum sufficient to insure the child against poverty.

Conscious of her own physical inability to protect or provide for her child, and vaguely hoping that rest and a genial climate might prolong her days until Stasie was old enough to take care of herself, Mrs. Verner accepted the old man's offer, and went away with him to his Eastern home, taking Stasie, then about a year old, with her. Whether the poor young widow found the repose and security she hoped for, or

withered under the influence of a life so unsuited to European habits and training, God only knows, but she did not survive her ill-assorted marriage two years. Her elderly husband bitterly mourned her loss, and transferred all his affections to his wife's little girl, who developed into the spoilt pet, the diminutive tyrant of the Consulate. When about six years old, however, she began to droop, her stepfather was terrified. He would even have paid large sums out of his painfully-gathered and rigidly-guarded hoard to restore his darling to her natural strength and vivacity, but where was he to find help? In his extremity he summoned what native skill was within reach, but in vain! At this juncture the missionary whose introduction had led to the establishment of little Stasie as queen of the Consulate, made his appearance at Mardin, on his homeward journey, having been successful in his labors, and being recalled to report them by the society he represented.

Kharapet received him with embraces and tears of joy. Here was a counsellor, a comforter, a savior! His advice was clear and short. "You must send the child to England at once," he said; "she simply wants

a European climate; she will die here."

"And what is to become of me without her?"

groaned Kharapet.

"Better part with her for a few years than lose her altogether," returned Mr. Mathews, the missionary. "After a few years you must pay another visit to London, and then she can return here with you, and be your companion for the rest of your days.'

"Oh, the dreary years—the dreary years!"
"They will soon pass," said the missionary consolingly. "Let her come home with me. Mrs. Mathews will take charge of her, and bring her up with our own dear ones in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, so that hereafter she may be a help to you in your favorite scheme of drawing nearer together the Nestorian and the English churches."

This project found favor in the eyes of the afflicted Consul, and after a keen encounter as to the terms to be given and received for the little invalid's education and maintenance, Stasie Verner, attended by a Chaldean nurse, started for Alexandretta, on her westward journey.

Arrived at the residence of the missionary's family, Stasie soon became one of them, and one of the noisiest. Here she was happy enough. Mrs. Mathews was no strong-minded disciplinarian, but she was kindly, honest, well-meaning, and not unjust. She kissed and cuffed the little stranger as she did her own children; scolded or cried over them all according to the temper of the moment; and the household scrambled on, not unhappily or uncomfortably—the girls getting what instruction they could at a neighboring day-school, and occasional treats, wildly enjoyed, to the Crystal Palace or to Richmond, as the finances permitted. Mrs. Mathews managed as best she could for her little protégée; the payments made on her account seemed far from munificent, but what cash passed through her reverend husband's clutches she neither asked nor knew.

When Stasie was about eleven, her stepfather was obliged, by public and private business, to visit London—an ecstatic period for his adopted daughter, who enjoyed unlimited indulgence, and received unbounded promises of Arab steeds, jewels, attendants, and Heaven knows what, when she should resume her sway at Mardīn. The old gentleman was delighted by her progress, mental and physical, and agreed readily enough

to her remaining three or four years longer.

These years brought many changes. First, the missionary succumbed to fever; this brought a serious diminution of means to the family, though the good man had not been improvident, and had managed to store up some small provision for wife and children. Stasie continued to reside with them, the money paid

on her account forming an important item in the fami-

ly budget.

Then one of the boys got an appointment abroad, and so much was lifted from the widow's burden. The eldest girl, Ella-Stasie's special friend-had begun to pine for greater educational advantages, that she might fit herself for self-support. Even Stasie, the idlest of the young group, most given to dreaming, and finding nearly pleasure enough in the harmony of mere healthy existence, nearly excitement enough in games of cricket and battledore and shuttlecock, played in a large back-garden with which the old-fashioned Islington house was blessed, began to think she ought to do something, she knew not what.

She was always at the bottom of her class, always under punishment for neglected lessons, always the despair of her teachers, yet a bit of a favorite, for if she was saucy one hour she was kindly and helpful the next. Nor could she be considered quite ignorant. At times she was seized with a passion for reading story-books and a battered cheap edition of Shakespeare, that she had unearthed from behind a row of religious books in a nondescript apartment dignified by the name of "the Study," as also some stray volumes of Bulwer Lytton's, which latter did much to arouse her desire for knowledge. After reading Zanoni, she made up her mind to master the doctrines and tenets of the Rosicrucians when she returned to Syria, never doubting that she should there find some venerable mysterious priest who pursued profound scientific and astronomical researches under the deep blue of Eastern skies; but in the meantime she could not bend her mind to the low and narrow limits of spelling, grammar, geography, and the multiplication table! In which latter little Polly, the baby of the family, could beat her hollow.

While the months and years rippled by, scarce marked by any incident, Stasie began slowly to think of her return to Mardin, and even of progress in her Rosicrucian studies, with less of unmixed pleasure.

She had grown warmly attached to Ella, and even felt a sort of half-contemptuous liking for Bob, the second boy, destined for the medical profession; besides, the aforesaid Bob had, to his mother's horror, made some delightful theatrical acquaintances, and occasionally received from them orders, which enabled him to treat his sister and Stasie to ecstatic glimpses of dramatic delight. This was a joy she (Stasie) could not expect to find at Mardin, and for which the Arab steeds, the jewels, cloth of gold, salaaming attendants, and Rosicrucian priests would be but a poor exchange.

The period of trial and of separation was near at hand, and Stasie's courage had sunk lower and lower, when one day towards the close of February the startling news reached Mr. Kharapet's London agent and personal friend, Mr. Harding (of J. Harding & Co.), that H.B.M.'s Consul at Mardīn had died suddenly, after a bath injudiciously taken immediately on his re-

turn from a long and fatiguing ride.

These tidings changed the aspect of Stasie Verner's life. She had now no home, and belonged to no one. Her father's people had simply disregarded her completely, and of her mother's, only an elderly lady, Miss Stretton, a grand-aunt, had ever taken the slightest notice of her.

Stasie was deeply and sincerely affected when Mr. Harding himself announced the loss of her only friend

and protector.

This gentleman was not quite a stranger to her. From him Mrs. Mathews received the quarterly payments on account of her young protégée. He even visited the Islington residence at rare intervals, and held private interviews with the young lady, on whom he made a very favorable impression by the frank kindly bonhommie of his questions and friendly interest he seemed to take in her. She had spent a day occasionally at his handsome house near Regent's Park, where she had enjoyed herself in a spacious nursery with some pretty children, and been taken to drive in

the Park by Mrs. Harding, a soft-mannered, dark-eyed little woman.

"Your stepfather has not left you unprovided for," said Mr. Harding, after a pause, to allow the freshly-orphaned girl's tears unchecked course; "and I suppose that is all you care to know of such matters. I am one of the executors, and I am sure I need not say that I shall take particular care of your interests in every way. My co-executor is Hormuz Kharapet, your stepfather's half-brother. I dare say you have never seen him. He lived chiefly at Bombay, where I knew him; but he is now at Mardin. Poor Kharapet, rather unnecessarily, I think, has appointed, in addition to executors, a guardian, Mr. Percy Wyatt, who traveled in the East some years ago. Can you remember him? I think he must have been at Mardin before you came to England.

"My memory of every thing at Mardin is very shadowy," returned Stasic, drying her tears, and trying to steady her voice. "I vaguely remember some strange gentleman who used to take me on his knee and tell

me stories, but it is like a dream."

"I dare say it was Wyatt, just the sort of thing he would do! Well, he is away in Rome at present, and we can make no sort of change till he returns. I will not keep you any longer, my dear, for I have not much time, and I must have a talk with Mrs. Mathews. My wife shall come and see you in a day or two. You

will always find us true friends."

Stasie could only give him her hand in silence, and then escaped, to pour out her thoughts, her mingled grief and sense of isolation, to Ella, her most sympathetic confidante. Meantime Mr. Harding, with much civility, laid the state of Stasie's affairs before Mrs. Mathews, who gathered from his exposition that Kharapet had on his last visit to London made a will, bequeathing all he possessed to his stepdaughter,—that was now nearly three years ago,—and it remained to be proved whether he had since made another;

also, to ascertain what amount of property he had left, respecting which Mr. Harding had no certain knowledge. In any case, he felt sure that Stasie would not be left penniless, and that for the present Mrs. Mathews might venture to keep Miss Verner as an inmate, without risk of loss. When Mr. Percy Wyatt returned it was impossible to say what changes might take place, for which he (Mr. Harding) would be in no way responsible. Indeed, he believed a politician like Wyatt, and a woman of fashion like his wife, Lady Elizabeth, would take very little trouble about an obscure ward. Mr. Harding even doubted that Mr. Wyatt would accept the responsibility. To this Mrs. Mathews answered, with moist eyes, that with all her faults Stasie was like one of her own children to her, that she would miss her as much as any one of them, and that she was welcome to a home with her (Mrs. Mathews) until she was able to help herself, if indeed it were possible that a true Christian, as Mr. Kharapet seemed to be, could have the cruelty to leave Stasie penniless by any subsequent will.

So the matter remained for many months, during which the young orphan heard little or nothing of her own affairs, and continued to lead the same life as heretofore, broken by rare visits to Mrs. Harding, who

was always kind and pleasant.

The only distinct information which reached her good-natured protectress was conveyed by a message given as Mr. Harding was bidding Stasie good-by one Sunday evening, when she was starting on her return home after passing the day at his house.

"Tell Mrs. Mathews, Stasie, that the will is all right, and you are properly provided for," on receiving which Mrs. Mathews observed, "Thank the Lord! for though one ought to have faith, it is hard to sit

loose to this world with an empty pocket."

The arrival of "Mr. O. Percy and Lady Elizabeth Wyatt, from a prolonged visit to the Continent,"—as announced in the Morning Post, soon after Christ-

mas, made a great change in Stasie Verner's existence.

She was formally introduced to her guardian at his own residence, whither she was taken by Mrs. Harding. He asked her a few questions politely but vaguely, apologized for the absence of Lady Elizabeth, who was not able to come up to town just yet, expressed his readiness to be of service to her in any way, and then bowed them out.

Soon after this interview poor Stasie was informed of the terrible decision arrived at by executors and guardian—to remove her to a "high-class boardingschool," the choice of which, Mr. Wyatt was graciously pleased to say could not be in better hands

than those of Mrs. Harding.

In due course and with many tears Stasie's rather limited outfit was prepared, and she was deposited with those excellent ladies, "the Misses Boaden." But compensations sometimes come when least expected. Mrs. Mathews, with all her good nature, was generally on the look-out for chances, and finding there was room in Miss Boaden's establishment for a pupilteacher, succeeded in placing her eldest daughter Ella there, to the infinite comfort of her friend and confidante.

Time rolled on swiftly and silently in the monotony of school life; Ella had already passed her nineteenth, while Stasie was approaching her eighteenth year, at the time this story opens, when the period of stillness and inactivity for the latter was in its last moments,

and a total change was close at hand.

#### CHAPTER II.

STASIE had finished her note long before her friend ceased to write rapidly, and she still sat on, gazing at Ella without seeing her, while her thoughts strayed away to the dim distant past of her childhood in her stepfather's Syrian home, the half-forgotten realities of which were largely supplemented by a lively imagination, influenced no doubt by as extensive reading as her means permitted, on Eastern subjects. She was impatient for the arrival of the other executor, from whose interference on her behalf she expected so much, albeit she did not very clearly know what she wanted. Her leading idea was to leave school, to travel in Italy or Germany, or to return to the only home she ever knew. Latterly she had troubled herself more than she used as to her own future, as to whether the property bequeathed her was mere competence or wealth; on this point she had, on one or two of the rare occasions when she saw him, essayed to extract some distinct information from Mr. Harding, but in vain.

A friendly pat on the shoulder, a laughing assurance "that she need not disturb herself," "that she would always have cheese to her bread," was all her acting guardian deigned to say, so she was obliged to fall

back on conjecture.

She had grown weary and indignant at the prolonged imprisonment to which she was subjected, now that she felt herself a woman, and fancied she was equal to guide her own steps. To be shut up with children and half-formed ignorant girls, by no means of the class that might be expected at an establishment of the pretensions affected by the Misses Boaden, was too bad! for Stasie Verner, in spite of her middle-class training, was by nature an aristocrat, so far as hatred of vulgarity and meanness went.

While she sat musing with contracted brows, and a

mouth half-sad, half-pouting, she became vaguely aware that the front-door bell sounded, and that some one was being ushered into the drawing-room beneath, Elmwood House, in spite of As large name, being only one of a row of semi-detached villas slight as to construction and of small dimensions.

"It is late for a visitor," said Ella Mathews, with-out looking up from her writing. "I want this posted

by eight o'clock, and it must be seven now."
"Not quite, I think," returned Stasie dreamily.
wish I had a watch! I wonder if——"

She did not finish her sentence, but lapsed into her

own thoughts.

A moment or two after the door opened to admit the junior member of the firm, Miss Amelia Boaden, who held a card in her hand. "Stasie, there is a visitor below for you, your uncle, I believe," offering her the card: "you had better come down and speak to him, my dear."

Stasie started up, all quivering at this sudden fulfillment of her hopes, and taking the card, read the in-

scription thereon-

"Hormuz Kharapet, 23 Str. Mayfair."

"It is my stepfather's brother, the executor!" exclaimed Stasie. "Oh! I am so glad! I did not think he would be here so soon;" and she made for the door.

"Stay, Stasie! stay, my dear," said Miss Amelia eagerly. "Had you not better smooth your hair and

put on your best dress?" You are really--"

"My best dress," interrupted Stasie scornfully. "Bad is the best! I will go as I am, and then, if he has any feeling, he will make Mr. Harding give me some money to buy a new one. I am the worst dressed girl in the school, Miss Amelia, and you know it."

Without waiting for a reply, Stasie flung out of the

room, and descended the stairs rapidly.

In truth her toilette needed renewal. The black cashmere had grown nearly brown; marks of unpicked stitching showed visibly where alterations and

revivifications had taken place; the edges of the cuffs were frayed; the white frill round her throat, though not soiled, was crumpled; and her fair hair was rough and untidy. Nevertheless, with the light of suddenlyawakened life and hope sparkling in her eyes, glowing on her cheek, and dimpling round a mouth which could be sweet, scornful, or sad, as the spirit moved her, she was as pleasant an object as the eye could rest upon. Without fear or hesitation she opened the door, and entered the room swiftly, joyously, ready to welcome as a second father the man who awaited her, and whom she expected to find less aged, less decrepit indeed, than his brother, but gray, perhaps bent, and almost venerable, ready to pet and indulge her.

A figure was standing on the hearth-rug which made a step forward to meet her, so different from her fancy's sketch that she stopped short and forgot to accept the hand he held out. A man of middle stature, slight, and not ungraceful, though rather high shouldered, well and carefully dressed in the newest possible clothes, with small, fine brown hands peeping out of large snowy shirt cuffs; a pair of soft lustrous eyes, that seemed to Stasie of unfathomable depth and darkness; a lofty but rather narrow forehead; thick glossy black hair, beard, and mustaches; and a smooth, sallow, dusky complexion, were the items which she chiefly remarked.

"And is it possible you are little Stasie whom I remember playing in the court of the Consulate with her gazelle," he exclaimed in perfectly good English, although his accent was slightly foreign, and his voice, though carefully subdued, had in it something harsh and strident. Stasie recovered herself and gave him her hand with a frank smile.

"I suppose I am the same Stasie; but I cannot remember you at Mardin."

"Can you remember anything of Mardin?"

"Oh yes, much, only it seems all like a dream; but vou I do not remember," and she looked straight into his eyes as she spoke, then, with a slight blush, she

withdrew her hand, and sat down on the sofa.

Kharapet drew a chair near, and there was a slightly awkward pause, during which, though Stasie did not look up, she felt that his deep eyes were fixed upon her.

"I did not expect you quite so soon," she said, still

feeling ill at ease.

"You expected me, then? I have been five—six days in London, and it seemed long, very long, until I could come and see my poor brother's beloved Stasie. I little thought what I should find." These last words were murmured in a caressing voice, conveying such subtle delightful flattery that Stasie's heart beat quick with gratified vanity. "Are we not somehow related?" he continued; "ought I not to hold the place of your uncle and protector as well as executor to my brother's last testament?"

"I am sure," replied Stasie cordially, "I should be very thankful to have any relative that would be kind and take an interest in me, for I seem to have lost every one when dear Papa Kharapet was taken away,"—her voice broke a little,—"but I can hardly fancy you are

his brother, you are so much younger."

"I am his half brother, and considerably his junior, yet old compared to you, Stasie. I suppose I may call you Stasie? though you are such a grand young

lady-so tall and so fair!"

"Of course you may," she said with a pleased laugh, amused by his tone of deference; "I do hope you will be my friend, I want so many things. Mr. Harding is very kind, but I see him so seldom, and he is always in such a hurry that I can never even ask him."

"You must tell me all you want and wish," replied Kharapet, drawing his chair a little nearer. "I had just joined my poor brother, whom I also regarded as a father, when his death occurred; and I know how tender was his affection for you, how he looked to your

return, and longed for your presence even as a dry tree for the gracious rain. I shall best fulfill his wishes (which are most sacred to me) by watching over you, and, so far as I can, furthering your happiness."

"You are very good," murmured Stasie, a little embarrassed; "and did he—did he die quietly? without

pain?"

"Quite without pain—quite quietly," returned Kharapet, his deep eyes still fixed upon her with an eager, half-surprised look, and there was a pause—Stasie thinking how sad it was to be thus deprived of the only creature to whom she was necessary, but her attention was quickly fascinated by her companion's next words.

"I have only seen my colleague, Mr. Harding, two or three times since I arrived. He is your very good friend, and we hope to arrange your affairs to your satisfaction——"

"Then I do hope you will let me leave school," cried Stasie, interrupting him. "It is quite too shameful to be kept here so long. Do you know I shall be

eighteen next month?"

"Indeed," he exclaimed, with the air of one suddenly roused to the perception of a great truth. "It is a just cause of complaint that you should still be here, but the person to blame is your guardian. Now that I have come for the sole object of attending to your interests, I shall see Mr. Wyatt frequently, and see also that your wishes are carried out. Mr. Harding is so greatly occupied with the concerns of his business that he does not think how swiftly time rolls on, while your bright youth and beauty are left to the mournful seclusion of a prison like this," and the Syrian glanced indignantly round the neat apartment, its walls decked with washy water-color drawings, its tables crowded with crotchet mats, wax-flowers, and specimens from Tunbridge, Buxton, and even humbler Margate.

"It is tiresome," said Stasie, with a swift blush and pleased smile, "but that is all. The Misses Boaden

are kind enough, and I do very much what I like, but

I am quite too old to be here."

"Have you formed any plan-any idea of where you would wish to live? In such arrangements I need help, for though I have lived much with Europeans, especially Englishmen, and have even resided a while in London, I am scarcely fit to advise a young English lady in such a matter. Your own views no doubt will be our best guide. What would you say to residing with Mr. and Mrs. Harding?"

He looked at her keenly as he spoke, averting his

eyes as they met hers.

"I do not think I should like it," returned Stasie frankly. "They are kind and nice, and she is delightful; yet—" She paused, resuming with more vivacity, "I should like to go back to Mrs. Mathews, and you know, as she is a widow and far from rich, it might be a help to her."

"No, no!" cried Kharapet energetically, "that would not do. Orphaned and alone as you are, you require the patronage of the rich—the powerful, if, indeed, Lady Elizabeth would recommend some companion-some protectress. Her Ladyship is most friendly and condescending. I had the honor of dining-"

"I don't want to be patronized and condescended to," interrupted Stasie petulantly; "I want to go where they are fond of me, and where I am at home; or, better still, I want to go abroad. I want to see Rome and Nuremberg and the Tyrol,—and oh! heaps of places. Could you manage this for me, Mr .--- what ought I to call you?"

"Hormuz!" said he, in a low hesitating tone, "if

you will give my name a charm by speaking it!"

Stasie laughed uneasily, half-pleased, half-startled. "Well, then, help me to travel and see new countries, and I will call you what you like."

"I think I might manage even this for you," he said thoughtfully, "but not all at once. We shall see. I am not altogether free to act as I should wish, but----"

"Will you promise me that I shall leave this place within a month from the present time?" cried Stasie impetuously, and clasping her hands together, she bent forward resting them on her knee.

"I will," he returned promptly, "only I must try and persuade the head of this establishment to forgive the usual three months' notice, which is, I am told,

necessary."

"But you, or I can pay all the same," persisted

"It is never right to disregard money or money's worth," began the Syrian, when Stasie broke in upon him—

"Do tell me, have I much money? Am I well off? or have I only enough to live on by pinching? No one has ever told me any thing clearly, and I never have enough money."

"I scarcely know if you will be rich," returned Hormuz; "the task of collecting and realizing my poor brother's property is tedious and difficult. How-

ever, you will at least have enough!"

"Then do tell Mr. Harding to let me have some money! I am going to stay with Mrs. Harding on Friday, and I do so want some new clothes and

things.'

"Your word is law," said the Syrian. And then the conversation turned on the late Consul—his fond preparations for his beloved step-daughter, and on her misty memories of her Eastern life—her experiences under Mrs. Mathews' care—of the position and prospects of the excellent widow—the number and occupations of her children, etc., etc.,—all which particulars the Syrian soon ascertained from Stasie's ready talk. At length Kharapet rose, and making a deep, not ungraceful bow, "I must," he said, "tear myself from a conversation that will long dwell in my memory; and you, my fair niece, as I shall consider you

-you will be before my eyes until we meet again, which will be, I trust, soon. Meantime you must not suffer any inconvenience I can remove. Allow me to give you, on account of the increased allowance which I shall take care you receive, this small sum for present emergencies," and taking out his "portemonnaie," he very carefully counted six sovereigns upon the polished walnut table.

Stasie's eyes sparkled. "Oh! thank you - thank you ever so much! You will pay yourself, will you not? I don't want presents, you know."

"Rest content," he replied, a smile softening his grave eyes, though it could scarce be seen through the thick beard which concealed the lower part of his face. "I have brought you a few mementoes from the sunny land where your childhood was passed, besides some jewels I have kept for you, because I knew such was the destination my brother intended for them. So for the present, farewell, fair lily; we shall meet at Mrs. Harding's."

The instant Stasie heard the front door shut, she darted up-stairs, and found Ella Mathews had finished her letter, and was busily employed renewing the torn

hem of a dress.

Stasie, after executing three or four wild pirouettes, sprang into the middle of her bed at a bound and stood upright there.

"What in the world is the matter?" exclaimed Miss

Mathews.

"Every thing that is delightful," cried Stasie. "The new executor is a dear, darling duck! He is going to take me out of this horrid den, and let me travel on the Continent; and he has brought me a box full of jewels, and above all, he has given me six gold sovereigns! I don't think I ever even saw so much money all together. What do you think of that Ella?" descending from her elevation with another bound. "He is very handsome, and quite youngthat is, rather young; he has such lovely eyes, and

what is more," swiftly reinstating her looking-glass on its table, and looking at her own image earnestly, "I fancy he thinks me very nice indeed"-a little triumphant nod—" not that he said so absolutely, but I could understand that he was astonished to find me -well, such a tolerable-looking girl; and yet I was horribly untidy, and my hair all loose. If he takes a fancy to me I shall just make him do what I like. Oh! it is delightful to find some one to think you nice."

"What a wild thing you are," said Ella Mathews, laughing; then more seriously, "you must play no heartless tricks, Stasie." Ella had a very quiet but earnest love affair of her own hidden away till better times would give her and her lover a right to speak of it.

. "Nonsense," cried Stasie. "You are too great an owl sometimes; and do, dearest Ella, put away that horrid old frock! You shall buy a new one, for you and I always go shares, don't we, dear? Let us ask Miss Amelia to come up to Spencer's to-morrow and buy the stuff."

Ella shook her head, and a very sweet smile played round her lips. "I can't take your money, dear Stasie. Mr. Harding would say very sharp things if he heard of such proceedings; and you forget what heaps of 'wants' you have yourself. Do not be so generous—I was going to say foolish—only you don't

deserve that from me!"

"You are really an ill-natured cat," said Stasie very gravely; "you will only put me to the trouble of choosing for you, and I have not such good taste as yours, don't you see? This money is just for my 'immediate requirements,' as that nice, dear executor said. When I go to Mrs. Harding I shall make all my big purchases. I am quite sure there is plenty of money for all I want, and I shall just tease their lives out till they let me go back to your mother. Oh! Ella, suppose you and I could travel together in Switzerland and Italy, even to Rome!-Rome," with a little shriek of delight. "Wouldn't it be too delicious? but we could not manage it alone. Why not take Hormuz Kharapet as a sort of male chaperonyou don't know how nice he is-I am just longing for you to see him. Only I wish he were not in European clothes. He would be ever so much nicer in a turban and baggy trousers, with a scimitar in his girdle; indeed, I almost wish he were a Mahometan. Of course it is better for himself that he is not, but he would decidedly be nicer and more interesting if he were. Do you know he is exactly what you might imagine Selim to be, or Hafed in the fire-worshipers; only it is rather funny to imagine either Selim or Hafed an executor mixed up with lawyers and parchments, and English law courts. Still, even as a Christian he is charming—so uncommon—and so polite. Probably he is not accustomed to fair girls, but he is evidently quite taken with me, and I shall do my best to be agreeable to him. I wish I had a nice new dress for Friday; that is out of the question, but I will buy a large tulle cravatte and frills, and new gloves, and shoes, and a sash. I wonder if Hormuz Kharapet will come to the theater? He speaks English quite like an Englishman. I do wish you had seen him, Ella!"

Here the conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Miss Amelia Boaden, the younger and more energetic of the sisters who ruled Elmwood House. "Well, my dear Stasie, I should like to hear something of your interview with Mr. ——— I did not quite catch his name; but he told me he is executor to your late excellent stepfather, and I presume he is the gentlemen whose absence and whose objections so often offered obstacles to a more enlarged system of education for you, my dear?"

"Yes, Miss Amelia, he is the other executor; but I am sure he would never object to any thing right or

reasonable."

"That is a good deal to be sure of on the strength of one short interview, my dear," returned Miss Amelia dryly. "Come, my sister is in her own room, and would like to hear what you have to say, as I presume your stay with us will now soon be brought to a close."

"I am not at all sure of that, Miss Amelia; but you must acknowledge that I am old enough and big enough to leave school," said Stasie, as she rose and followed her preceptress out of the room.

Mr. Harding's residence at York Gate, Regent's Park, was the typical middle-class house of a well-to-do citizen. Every thing in it was solid, handsome, and in the most perfect order. The door and bell handles, the name plate, the steps, were in the highest condition of polish and whiteness. Within, the same care and attention were every where visible, suggestive of a tight hand. In the rather heavily-furnished drawingroom, however, something of a different and more graceful taste was discernible. Flowers were always judiciously placed about it; velvet rugs and silken hangings of Persian manufacture, Oriental china and quaint bronzes, redeemed it from being a stereotyped edition of other rooms.

Here Mrs. Harding's happiest hours were spent in the morning, when she administered simple and very small doses of rudimentary education to her children, and better still in the evening hour, before papa's return from the city, when she answered their many questions and told them stories to their heart's

content.

Could any of Mrs. Harding's acquaintance have looked in at such times, they would scarce have recognized her-bright, animated, playful; a glimpse might be caught of a nature very different from her ordinary seeming, but she had not many visitors.

When first Stasie knew Mr. and Mrs. Harding, she was charmed with the frank cordiality of his manner and a little chilled by the indifference of hers. This

soon wore off, however, and was replaced by sincere liking for the wife, notwithstanding the strong contrast between the eagerness and animation of the one and the stillness of the other.

Here Stasie Verner found her hostess with her three children when she reached York Gate on the ardently-

expected Friday.

"You are later than I expected," said Mrs. Harding, shaking hands with her cordially (they did not

kiss on every occasion).

"I came with Ella Mathews, who is going home for a day or two. Her mother sent for her, and I waited to put her into an omnibus before coming on here."

"Were you in charge of her or she of you?" asked

Mrs. Harding with a smile.

"Oh, we take charge of each other. I think she is more of a coward than I am. How do you do, Johnnie? Come Ethel—Willie, don't you know me? give me a kiss, you darlings! Willie is looking much better, Mrs. Harding."

"Yes, he is better," returned the mother, pressing the little dark curly head to her side, while Stasie took

the fair shy little girl on her knee.

"Did you come in a bus or a cab?" asked Johnnie, a large, bony, red-haired, fiery-tempered boy, some years older than the others, and an ugly likeness of his father.

"You will like to take off your bonnet before luncheon, Stasie," said Mrs. Harding, and led the way

to the rarely-used "spare room."

"How delightful it is to come and stay here," cried Stasie, unable to repress her abounding joyousness. "It is so dull and tiresome at school; your house is charming, and it is so good of you to have me," she continued, throwing her hat and mantle on the bed.

Mrs. Harding smiled. "Most young people would consider this a very dull house," she said, "but nevertheless I think you will enjoy your visit, for I have

permission to supply your needs and renovate your wardrobe."

"How delicious!" cried Stasie; "I am sure that is Hormuz Kharapet's doing. How nice and kind he is!

Don't you think he is?"

"He is exceedingly ready to oblige you. He has had deep discussions with Mr. Harding as to what you might or might not have. Executors, you know, have but limited powers."

"Well," returned Stasie, "as long as I get what I

want, I do not care what their powers may be."

"Mr. Kharapet dines with us to-day," resumed Mrs. Harding; "and after luncheon we must arrange about our shopping. It is considered right that you should call on Lady Elizabeth Wyatt, and I suppose you would first like to have a new dress."

"I should indeed. Am I not awfully shabby?"

"You might be smarter," said Mrs. Harding, with a smile; "but luncheon is ready and the children ravenous."

Before the mid-day meal was over Kharapet made his appearance, somewhat to Mrs. Harding's surprise.

"Ah! Miss Verner—Stasie," he said, after saluting Mrs. Harding, his large eyes lighting up as they met hers, "I am rejoiced to meet you again. It seems long since my visit to your school, but you will find I have not been idle."

"Thank you," returned Stasie, with a delightful quick blush—she changed color readily. "I have been thinking of all sorts of things that you can help

me in since I saw you."

"Do not make too large demands," said Mrs. Harding, as Kharapet drew a chair to the table and pro-

ceeded to attack the good things before him.

He presently asked how Stasie managed to travel from Forest Hill. "I reproach myself for not going to fetch you. Although I love and honor most things English, yet I would not adopt all its ways—the freedom of your young ladies, for instance."

"Yet you must be quite familiar with our habits as regards them, you have lived so much with English people," said Stasie.

"It is true; nevertheless I observe differences. There are the daughters of my noble friend, Lord

Saintsbury; they never leave the house alone."

"That is different," said Mrs. Harding. "What do you want, Johnnie?-wine? Oh no, toast and water is much better for little boys. That is quite different; the Ladies Lumley are wealthy aristocrats, and can always command caretakers. We are but respectable bourgeoises."

"I wish I were an aristocrat," sighed Stasie, who was busy mashing some strawberries with cream for Willie.

"Why?" asked Mrs. Harding; "are you not happy

and well off as you are?"

"Oh, I can scarce say why; but I imagine there is something refined about their life—a something chivalrous about the men, even when they run wild and do not pay their debts."

"A school-girl's idea, dear!"

"Perhaps so. Still I am happy enough-or I intend to be, with your good help." A sweet, frank smile, and a little confidential nod to the Syrian, which he received with a flash of delight beaming over his face, but immediately suppressed.

"We cannot get a box before next Thursday, to see Jefferson in Rip van Winkle," resumed Mrs. Harding. "Will you come with us, Mr. Kharapet?"
"I regret I cannot. I am engaged to my good

patron to arrange a meeting in support of the 'Church Assimilation Society for drawing nearer the Nestorian

and English Churches."

"Can there be much in common between Protestantism and Eastern Christianity?" asked Mrs. Harding, as she adjusted a napkin round Willie's neck. "Confess, Mr. Kharapet, you have the Oriental indifference to dramatic displays, unless, indeed, for ballets, and would rather be excused coming with us."

"You are wrong, indeed you are wrong," he exclaimed. "It is always a pleasure to be with you and my fair niece; but on the present occasion the matter in hand is so important that I must exercise self-denial."

Mrs. Harding smiled; and Stasie, whose interests had been aroused by his words, exclaimed, "How do you mean, about drawing the Nestorian Church nearer to ours, Mr.—Mr. Kharapet." She hesitated a little how to call him.

"Why address me so formally?" he said insinuatingly; "surely you and I-so nearly related, I may say—can call each other by our Christian names? Shall we not, Mrs Harding?"

"You are not related," replied Mrs. Harding with the gentle indifference which generally characterized her manner, "but I see no objection to your using

your Christian names."

"And mine will acquire beauty and music if you use

it," said Kharapet to Stasie, with a courteous bow.
"I am glad to bestow such favors so cheaply," said Stasie laughing, yet blushing too. "Now, Hormuz, pray tell me how you are to assimilate our res-

pective Churches?"

Whereupon the Syrian entered into a long explanation of the original simplicity and purity of the Nestorian creed, and of its points of resemblance to Protestantism, with an exposition of the advantage to Christianity in general if it could be affiliated to the Church of England. His words flowed with wonderful ease, and surprisingly few grammatical errors. His manner, too, was gentle and graceful, and though his voice was naturally harsh, its tones were most carefully subdued to persuasiveness. Nevertheless, he did not succeed in making his subject very clear to his hearers, which Stasie accounted for by her own ignorance and dullness. At any rate the exposition carried them to the end of luncheon, when the children, feeling the renewed strength which comes from eating, grew restless and audacious.

"May I get down, mamma?" asked Ethel.

"Stay, dear, you must say grace, and then look at

that picture-book on the chair till nurse comes."

"Thank God for a good dinner may I get down now," said Ethel, all in a breath. Johnnie, without asking any permission, slipped from his seat, and was quickly at Kharapet's side. "Now," he said, "will you give me some of those sweeties you said you would bring?"

"My dear Johnnie!" remonstrated his mother.
"He told me he would!" insisted Johnnie.

"And here they are," said Kharapet good-humoredly, as the little ones crowded round him. "This is better than Rahat Lakaum. This is Mardīn sweetie, with a flavor of pomegranate. I had it straight from Bagdad. You ought to ask papa to get some home for you by one of his ships. It is perfectly pure and wholesome, Mrs. Harding-no bad London mixtures! Ah! Stasie, you have eaten plenty of this at Mardin, I dare say?"

"Give me a little," said Stasie, laughing, and stretching out her hand. "I fancy I remember it."

No sooner had she closed her white teeth upon it than she gave a little nod, and as soon as she had disposed of the morsel she exclaimed, "Oh, yes! I remember this well !- the sweet, delicious scented taste! It seems to bring back a courtyard, with such a glare on one side of it, and a surly old camel kneeling in a corner in the shadow. And wasn't there a camel-driver-very, very brown and very gaunt?"

"Yes, yes; that was the Mardin Consulate," said Kharapet, rubbing his hands softly over each other, and looking keenly, hungrily at her. "I did not think you would remember even so much of your early

home; I feared you had quite forgotten "

"I often think of it," returned Stasie dreamily, "and fancy I remember it; but how much is memory and how much imagination I cannot tell. Do give me a

little more of that—what do you call it?—Hormuz—" a little coquettish pause before the name.

"Helwa," he returned. "It is a great favorite in the

Turkish harems."

"Don't give it all to Stasie Verner," cried Johnnie.

"She is big—she can't have what she likes; but I never get no sweeties!"

"Have mine, Stasie dear," said Willie, trying to climb on her knee, and taking a piece half sucked

from his rosy mouth.

"Oh, Willie!" cried his mother, laughing, "that is very ill-bred."

"He is a dear, kind little fellow," said Stasie strok-

ing his head. "Eat it up yourself, Willie."

"Now, Stasie, if you have quite finished, we had better go out," said Mrs. Harding. "As I have nearly carte blanche from the powers that be in the matter of

dress for you, we shall have plenty to do."

"How delightful!" cried Stasie. "I have to thank you for this," holding out her hand to Kharapet, who took it almost timidly. "I shall never be able to remember all I want," she continued. "May I come into your room and write a list while you dress, Mrs. Harding? You can help me."

"Yes, certainly."

"May I be permitted to accompany you?" asked Hormuz.

Mrs. Harding smiled. "I think," she said, "we can do our shopping best alone; but I shall be happy to

set you down anywhere."

Without waiting for a reply she walked away upstairs. Stasic followed her, thinking, she did not know why, that Mrs. Harding was not quite friendly to Hormuz Kharapet.

## CHAPTER III.

This visit to Mrs. Harding produced an intoxicating effect upon Stasie. She suddenly found herself the pet of the house. Mr. Harding chose tit-bits for her at dinner, and told her his choicest stories, besides paying her very broad compliments, and encouraging his favorite, the eldest boy, to climb on her back and pull down her hair.

Kharapet was constantly at the house. He said little, but brought her offerings of sweetmeats, and gazed at her with an air of wondering adoration, calculated to create in her a high estimate of her own powers of fascination, while Mrs. Harding, though never demonstrative, managed to impress upon Stasie the pleasant feeling that with her also she was a favored guest.

The days which intervened before the vividly anticipated evening at the theater were delightfully occupied with shopping and dressmakers, and so passed quickly.

Mr. Harding had agreed to dine out, to avoid an early repast and a lonely evening at home; and as soon as the lady of the house and her guest had departed, the neat parlor-maid cleared away the dinner things, observing to the house-maid, who was trimming a cap in the housekeeper's room, "I am sure I wish I knew when master will be in. I do so want to run to Tottenham Court Road before the shops are shut; and it is so seldom one has a chance in this house."

"I'd go if I were you," returned her fellow-servant.
"Cook is off already. If master does come home before you are back, why, I can answer the bell; he

won't heed."

"It's easy to see you are new to the place," said the parlor-maid, with a shake of the head, as she screwed down the tablecloth press. "I believe master would know from outside the door if the wrong servant came half way up the kitchen stair to open it! I never see his like—never! Sometimes I think I'd give a good deal if I might slap his face, he is that aggravating, and other times I think he isn't half bad; anyways I'm glad I am not his wife. Law, Sarah! what missus has to put up with!"

"I begin to think so," returned Sarah. "It must be hard for her. Thank the Lord, Jane, you and I can give warning, and leave at the end of the month."

"So we can. Still if I were missus I think I could manage him. She answers soft and reasonable and respectful, always treating him as if he was a gentleman when he is in his tantrums; if she'd just shy a soup-plate fall of hot soup at his head, that's the sort of explanation he would understand. He knows no man would put up with his nonsense, and that's the reason he keeps only women servants. I am sure he is rich enough: still he is not so bad to us, but I can't abide him when he is on the rampage."

"It's not a bad place, after all," said the housemaid; five servants and a man to clean the boots and

windows. There are many worse."

"A fair table and meals regular," chimed in the parlor-maid. "I think I'll venture to go, Sarah. He won't come home when there's no one here to cosset him. At any rate he will not want dinner, and you'll

not mind opening the door to him?"

"Not I," returned Sarah, who was of a less imaginative, sensitive nature than Jane, the parlor-maid. "He can't eat me, and if he does, I'll make it uncomfortable for him. Will you buy me two yards of blue sarsnet ribbon while you are out, like a good girl, and a reel of black cotton?"

Jane accepted the commission, and ascended to her room to adorn; hardly had she accomplished half her toilette when an angry peal of the front-door bell made the stout-hearted Sarah jump. Throwing down her work she went quickly to answer it.

Mr. Harding was standing outside regarding the door with an angry suspicious stare—a man above

middle height, broadly and powerfully built, with a strong handsome face, sandy hair, light eyes, thick red whiskers and mustaches. He was remarkably well dressed, and though not looking quite the conventional gentleman, had not the slightest tinge of vulgarity in his aspect.

"Where's Jane? and why the devil do you open the door?" were his first words, as he crossed the thresh-

old and handed his hat to Sarah.

"Please, sir, she has just gone to her room, and I thought it was better to open the door at once than to keep you waiting till she came down," she returned

with perfect civility and composure.

"Send her to me at once," said Mr. Harding sternly, as he turned into the dining-room and threw himself into a vast luxurious chair, looking round him with an impatient dissatisfied expression, as if seeking whereon to wreak his ill-temper. While he thus sat glowering, Jane, neat, collected, but really nervous, presented herself.

"Oh! you are there, are you?" said Mr. Harding, a little disappointed at not finding her "absent with-

out leave."

"Yes, sir."

"Ah—hum! how long is it since your mistress left?"

"Nearly an hour, sir."

"Ha! they are half melted by this time, and serve them right, for spending their time and money on such balderdash. Tell cook to send me some dinner—I am famished."

"Dinner, sir!" said Jane, dismayed. "Have you

not dined?"

"No. Oh, you thought you had got rid of me, did you? You are just mistaken. Go and get me some dinner, but first I will take some brandy and seltzer."

Jane went quickly in search of the desired beverage, and seized the opportunity of exclaiming, "Law! Sarah, he wants his dinner, and cook out. Can you cook a bit? I never even peeled a potato. Isn't it aggravating."

'I can do a chop," returned Sarah in some trepidation, "but he is that particular. I'd rather not."

"Bless us and save us! there's the bell again, and I haven't an inch of ice left; the boy promised to bring a pound more, and he hasn't come!" She snatched up the tray, and went off quickly.

"Well," cried her irate master, "what has cook for

me?"

"There's some lamb as was left from dinner, sir, and a piece of salmon that was put by for supper in case

missus wanted any-"

"Half-cold leavings!" ejaculated Mr. Harding with contempt. "This is a nice home for a man to come to. By heaven, it's too bad! Go-get me a steak, and tell cook to make me a savory omelet. Look sharp now; what are you staring at?"

"I'm afraid, sir, there are no eggs in the house," said

Jane, appalled by the imminence of the danger.

"No eggs! Are there no eggs at the butterman's or the milk shop, or, where the deuce do you get them? Look here—something has gone wrong, I know it by your hang-dog look. What the-! By gad-the cook's out-that's the secret, is it? Now, don't tell me lies! By heaven, I'll go search the house for her!"

"Yes, sir, cook is out," replied Jane, with the courage of despair. "Missus said you were not dining at home, and cook thought she might run out for half

an hour to buy some things she wanted, so-" "Did your mistress give her leave?" in a tone of

suppressed fury.

"No, sir, missus didn't. Cook never asked," said the girl hastily, as if eager to screen her mistress.

"A pretty state of discipline, by George! Look here—what's to be done about my dinner?"

"Please, sir, Sarah can cook a steak, but I think there is some cold roast beef, quite cold, and-""

"Better not venture on Sarah's cooking, eh!" said

Mr. Harding gloomily. "There, bring me something to eat—dinner is out of the question. It is too bad after working hard all day to come back to the discomfort and neglect of a house like this. Go, make haste." Jane gladly escaped to seek eagerly in the larder for what dainties she could find, and proceeded to set forth the cold viands to the best advantage, striving to sooth the family juggernaut with cunningly-mixed salad dressing, and to propitiate him with pickles.

Mr. Harding was really hungry, and so relishing the simple fare provided, grew more genial and disposed

to talk.

"I suppose the children are all in bed?"

"Yes, sir.".

"Hum! not a soul to speak to. What time did Mrs. Harding set out?"

"About half-past seven, I think, sir."

"Ha! I'd bet a fiver she gave that cook leave to go out."

"I am sure not, sir."

"How the deuce do you know? and why are you trying to bamboozle me? It's not to be done, Jane, I can tell you. Did Mr. Kharapet go with Mrs. Harding?"

"No, sir; he went out with them after luncheon,

but did not return."

"Ah! catch him stifling himself at a theater! There, you may take away, Jane, and feel in the left pocket of my dust coat for a newspaper. Then draw up that blind, put the brandy and seltzer on the little table near my chair." So saying, Mr. Harding established himself in much comfort, and proceeded to peruse the city article carefully.

He had begun to nod over his studies, however, and was fast dropping into a sound sleep when Jane reappeared with a countenance considerably lightened,

and announced "Mr. Kharapet."

"He has something to divert him now," she said to

her companion, "and we may have half an hour's

peace."

Mr. Harding started up to receive his guest with alacrity. "Come along, Kharapet," he said. "I thought you might look in as you did not turn up at the office to-day. What will you take? Sit down, sit down."

"I thank you," returned Kharapet blandly, as he advanced to the seat pointed out. "No, I was unable to go into the city to-day, and had an appointment

with my Lord Saintsbury this evening."

"Have you dined?"

"I have; but I shall feel obliged for a little lemon-

ade or cold water."

"Ah! you Eastern fellows have the pull over us in the matter of drink," said Harding, as he rang the bell and ordered the desired refreshment. "Why, you must save pounds a year! Now I can't do without my glass of wine, or spirits and water."

"It is habit, and the difference of climate," returned Kharapet mechanically; and there was a pause—each waited for the other to begin. Mr. Harding lit a cigar, and offered one to his companion, who

declined.

"Those Moreira shares are still rising," observed

Harding at length. "I told you they would."

"So I see; yet you must have a care. They will come down with a run before many days are over."

"I'll venture to hold on a bit longer," rejoined Harding. "I am sure I can rely on you for friendly action."

"So far as I can with safety to myself assist you, I will," said the Syrian cautiously; "but you must be

prudent."

And without discussing the matter, whatever it might be, in which both were interested, they glided into talk of their past experiences and mutual transactions in Bombay—none of which concern the pres-

ent story. They had evidently known each other well

in the lifetime of the older Kharapet.

Sometimes their reminiscences were of a kind that would not look well on these pages, and occasionally they lapsed into Arabic, with which Mr. Harding was tolerably familiar. He laughed more than once, long and loud, but his companion found sufficient vent for his mirth in pressing his slender hands together, and chuckling in a low inward manner.

Jane came, lit the gas, and drew down the blinds without interrupting their conversation, and its drift

had again changed to the present.

"I suppose those women will soon come back from that tomfoolery. I suspect that's what's keeping you,

Kharapet, eh?"

"I should like to see Mrs. Harding and her young charge," said Kharapet demurely. "And speaking of her reminds me to warn you afresh against staying too long on those Moreira shares. I have no objection to your making a fair profit on the transaction, but Stasie's interest must be cared for before every thing."

"Who is going to injure it?" asked Mr. Harding

gruffly.

"I do not suppose you will intentionally, but you are running a risk; and if you hold on too long, and lose her money, I must see that you refund it."

"You have turned suddenly conscientious," replied Harding, with a sneer. "You usedn't to be so strait-

laced."

The Syrian smiled a triumphant smile that showed all his white teeth and glittered in his black eyes. "Good and faithful friend," he said, "Stasie Verner's interests and mine are or will be the same. Know, O excellent Harding, that I love that beauteous creature, and I will wed her. Am I not the luckiest, happiest man on earth? I came, after many difficulties, as you know, all this weary way determined to marry her, even were her hair red, her eyes green, her form hump-backed! and lo! I find a golden-haired angel, with

soft speaking eyes, the grace of a gazelle, lips like a pomegranate, hands white as snow! It is a foretaste of heaven to feel her velvet touch, and all this will be mine." Kharapet spoke with a suppressed rapture of anticipation, a sort of tremulous passion, that evidently surprised his hearer, who did not seem too well pleased.

"Why! how the devil do you know she will have

"She must," replied the Syrian, in a low concentrated tone, "I will lay hold upon her and keep hernone shall take her out of my hand-but she will be mine willingly. I see I please her; she gives me kind glances, friendly words; her accent as she says my name is tender, and she has seen none other save me. Nor am I ill-favored, Mr. Harding." He glanced round for a looking-glass, but finding none, continued-"I am still young, and I love her; I hunger and thirst for her presence, yet when she comes it overpowers me-I feel a strange restraint-she has a nameless power which I must conquer."

"Well, you have been going ahead!" exclaimed Harding. "Why, how often have you seen this girl?"

"Times and seasons do not count in such a passion

as mine. She has never left my sight."

"And what do you think, my good sir, will the guardian say to your proposal?" interrupted Harding.
"He will not object. I stand well with him. I have

obliged him."

"Ah!" cried Harding—a prolonged "Ah!" "If I were to tell him of those little transactions at Bushire,—of that affair with Himnar's people,—I am afraid he might not think you a very desirable husband for his ward."

"My friend," said the Syrian quietly but significantly, "you will do no such thing; we should indeed be foolish to injure each other by any unnecessary revelations of past mistakes and errors." He looked with unusual steadiness straight into Mr. Hard-

ing's eyes as he spoke.

"What do you mean?" returned that gentleman, with some degree of bluster in his tone; but his glance sank even as he spoke, and he resumed, with a little embarrassment, "You never understand a joke, Kharapet. It does not look well when a man is so ready to fancy you are going to split on him."

"Split," repeated Kharapet, as if puzzled. no. I quite understand what—what you call a joke, when a joke is meant, and I am quite sure, joking apart, that you feel convinced that I am a very suitable

husband for my brother's heiress."

"Ay, there's the rub! isn't it, Kharapet? To think that your brother's hard-earned money should go to a stranger. Never mind, man; you have a better chance of grabbing it by marriage than by any other way. You used not to be so great a favorite with your late lamented brother."

The Syrian smiled, not a pleasant smile. "Fortune has compensations for the descrying," he said. "Do I understand that you will offer no obstacle to my

hopes?"

"No; that is, I reserve my decision. We will see how matters go on. There is a good deal to be seen to first-much to be considered," replied Harding

very deliberately.

"We will discuss the question further," remarked Kharapet. "I think you will find that our interests are identical, only I would strongly advise you to sell out those shares at once, and reinvest the sum originally expended in Government or guaranteed stock without loss of time."

There was something significant in his tone, and he caressed his silky beard with a gesture usual with him when speaking earnestly. Mr. Harding did not

reply, and Kharapet went on-

"It rests with yourself how to dispose of the fruits of your speculation. I should be sorry to do any thing unfriendly, but I have duties imposed upon me by the executorship which I must not neglect, and———" he

paused.

"Of course, of course," returned Mr. Harding, rousing himself from a fit of thought; "we are both equally anxious to do the best we can for the girl; an uncommon fine creature she is; if I hadn't a wife already I would see if I could not cut you out."

The Syrian's dark eyes lit up for an instant with a fierce glare, like an irritated wild animal. He smiled, however, a rather forced smile, as Harding went on—"But I made a fool of myself long ago, ran my head into the noose for the sake of a pretty face that was all the owner's fortune. In short, I never thought enough of my own interest. Well, Kharapet, come up to the office—let me see—the day after to-morrow; we will go thoroughly into the accounts, and I'll undertake to satisfy you on all points."

As he uttered these words the two men looked steadily at each other, and there was a short si-

lence.

"I will be with you about two," replied Kharapet, rising to take leave; but his movement was checked by the sound of a carriage stopping, followed by a peal

of the front door bell.

"Here are the ladies," said Kharapet, making a step towards the door, which was soon thrown open to admit Stasie, who entered slowly, and walked to a chair, where she sat down, without noticing either Mr. Harding or Kharapet.

"Well, Stasie, how are you?" said Mr. Hard-

ing.

"Oh! I beg your pardon," cried Stasie, starting up and rushing over to shake hands with him. "Do you know I was so absorbed in the play that I still seem to see it and nothing else. Oh, Hormuz, why did you not come? You would have been enchanted! It was not acting—it was nature!—the queer, idle, genial, kindly Rip Van Winkle lived and moved and dawdled

before you; and when he came back after his twenty years' sleep and found himself forgotten—when he waited the hesitating recognition of his daughter—it was too touching!—all the more because of the funny quaintness of the poor old man. I could not help crying. You cried too, didn't you, dear Mrs. Harding?"

"I am afraid I did. Tears are with me a simple physical weakness," said Mrs. Harding, a faint color

rising to her cheek.

"A man slept twenty years!" exclaimed Mr. Harding, with great contempt; "and you two go crying over such rubbish as that!—by George, you are only fit for a lunatic asylum!"

Stasie laughed. "Certainly it sounds absurd; but if you only saw it! I am sure you would have felt as

we did."

"I doubt that."

"Well, you would, I am sure," turning to Hormuz, who had drawn a chair near, and was gazing at her through his half-closed eyes.

"I would, I would," he exclaimed hastily. "I should

have felt as you did."

"Come, it is getting late. Will you take some supper or something, Stasie? though I warn you the cook is out, so I don't know how you are to get any thing."

"Is cook out?" said Mrs. Harding nervously.

"Oh, I do not want any thing," cried Stasie. "I will go away to bed and dream of Rip Van Winkle. What a wonderful gift to be able to act like that! Good night, Mr. Harding—good night, Hormuz."

"One moment," said that individual. "Shall you be disengaged to-morrow? I should like to bring you the jewels I took charge of, and a little gift I ventured

to add myself."

"Jewels!" said Stasie, pausing on her way to the door. "Oh yes. He may come; may he not, Mrs. Harding?"

"I am not sure we ought to give you the jewels till you are of age, Stasie," said Mr. Harding, with a goodhumored laugh. "But I am afraid Kharapet is going to give you too much of your own way."

"Ah, he perceives that I am to be trusted," said Stasie, laughing, as she kissed her hand and left

them.

It was not, however, till two or three days later that

the promised jewels reached Stasie.

"To-morrow," said Kharapet, as he sipped some black coffee after dinner, "to-morrow I shall indeed bring you the long promised trinkets, dear Stasie! Our good friend Harding has been somewhat over-scrupulous. He may be erring on the safe side, but I think he might trust you; you would not insist on his replacing what he gave to yourself because the law entitled you to do so when you come of age."

"Of course I should not be so dishonest," cried Stasie; "so be sure you bring me the 'pitty sings,' as Ethel calls them. You know I am coming out in colors on Sunday. I am having *four* new dresses all at once. You will have to pay some terrible bills for me,

Mr. Harding."

"Ah, my dear, I will take care you do not go too far. Mrs. Harding knows the length of your tether."

"We have not even approached its length," she returned. "Pray, Mr. Kharapet, how did your meet-

ing go off to-day?"

"Very successfully. My Lord Saintsbury made a most excellent speech. My own poor efforts, too, were listened to with courtesy, and even considerably applauded."

"It is wonderful how beautifully you speak English," exclaimed Stasie. "Where did you learn it so

well?"

"I was early placed in the office of an English merchant in Bombay, and then I had the honor of being secretary and interpreter to Mr. Percy Wyatt during his travels in Persia and Turkish Arabia; besides which I love study."

"Ay, Kharapet is a dab at languages. How many

can you manage?"

"Oh, not many languages—a few dialects of Syriac

and Hindustani."

"It must be delightful to know a great many languages," said Stasie. "Tell me, what was the meeting

about to-day?"

"For promoting the establishment of an English and Syrian College at Antioch where priests may be trained for the evangelization of the Nestorian and Chaldean churches."

"And do you get in any money for this scheme?" asked Mr. Harding, with an indescribable accent of

contempt and incredulity.

"There are several thousand pounds on our subscription list already, but of course we want a considera-

ble sum."

"I'll tell you what you'll do," said Mr. Harding, with an odd twinkle in his hard, light eyes. "You start a 'Collegiate Company,' with so many shares, to pay six per cent.; offer educational advantages in Hindustani and Eastern dialects cheap to students for the civil or military service. I don't mind promoting it for a consideration. Your religious friends won't object to a trifle of filthy lucre in addition to their spirit-

ual gains."

"My good friend Harding, you scoff too much—you do not believe in the disinterested wish to spread the gospel of peace which so many of your noble countrymen cherish." Mr. Harding made a slight gesture expressive of incredulity, and Kharapet continued. "I have forgotten to mention a circumstance which concerns you, Stasie. At the close of the meeting I was in the committee room, and receiving the kind congratulations of the noble chairman, when one of the attendants approached me with a slip of paper, whereon was written, 'Miss C. Stretton would feel

much obliged for a minute's conversation respecting her niece, the late Mrs. Christian Kharapet.' I went as soon as I could to the ante-room and found a lady, not young but elegant, and well looking, as you English ladies are at almost any age. She asked me many questions, which showed acquaintance with your history, Stasie, and explained that she was the sister of your mother's mother. Do I make it clear?"

"Oh yes! I know her," cried Stasie. "She is my aunt or grand-aunt. She used sometimes to come and see me at Mrs. Mathews', and bring me toffy and things. Once she took me to Madame Tussaud's, but would not go into the chamber of horrors! I should like to see her. She used to cry about my poor mother, and I think she is the only relation I have in the

world."

"Just so," returned Kharapet. "It seems she has not long returned from the Continent, and was not aware of the death of my poor brother. She is very anxious to see you, Stasie; so I ventured, Mrs. Harding, to say she might call here, as I saw no reason to doubt her identity."

"Certainly," said Mrs. Harding indifferently.

"We had better be cautious," growled Mr. Harding, who had been nodding in his chair, but roused up at the mention of a visit. "She will be some old maid that hasn't a sixpence, and wants to sponge on Stasie. We must be cautious."

"I am sure if she is I should not grudge her a little help; and I suppose I have a right to see my own relations though I am not of age," said Stasie aggres-

sively. Mrs. Harding looked up surprised.

"No one wants to interfere with your rights, my young lady! but you must be guided by those who are older and wiser than yourself," retorted Harding testily. "Stasie will always be reasonable; few young ladies

"Stasie will always be reasonable; few young ladies have her sense and high spirit. I am sure, Mr. Harding, you can have no objection to receiving any friend of hers."

Mr. Harding muttered something about "making a fool;" and then started up, exclaiming, "Come along, Kharapet, let us have a smoke in the study. I see, Miss Stasie, you are just as self-willed as the rest of your sex, only you are more likely to get your own way than others."

"I hope so," said Stasie, laughing, as they went out.
"Come up to the drawing-room, dear," said Mrs.
Harding, "and play me something. I scarce ever hear
a note of music."

"Mine is not worth listening to, I fear," replied Stasie. "I do hope I may get some good lessons

now."

"Yes, you ought," rejoined Mrs. Harding, as they

mounted the stairs.

Stasie went gladly to the piano, and began her very simple *répertoire*. Soon Kharapet stole in, and, creeping over to the piano, leant upon it in closer neighborhood to the player than she quite liked. There was something, she knew not what, in his dark eyes and fixed gaze that made her uncomfortable; and in proportion as he grew more familiar and bolder, she grew shyer and more ill at ease, a transformation that might well mislead him as well as the onlookers.

It was late before Kharapet took leave, and Mr. Harding had been sound asleep in his chair for nearly

an hour.

"Till to-morrow," sighed the Syrian, as he pressed Stasie's hand at parting; adding, with an expressive

glance, "I hate the night."

"Oh! I love it; it is so delightful to feel one's-self dropping to sleep, and so nice to wake up fresh in the morning, especially here, where there is no horrible bell to rouse one at half-past six. I do not know how I shall bear to go back to school after the delightful time I have had with you, dear Mrs. Harding."

"Trust me. We will arrange matters as you wish,"

were Kharapet's last words.

When Stasie reached her own room she sat down be-

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fore the glass, looked long and steadily at herself, and fell into a reverie, or rather a fit of graver thought than was usual with her. First she recognized, with a very exquisite sense of pleasure, that she was more than a good-looking girl, and that Hormuz Kharapet shared that opinion. How good-natured and kind he was to her! His extravagant compliments reminded her of the lavish praises of her stepfather during his last visit to London, which was her only clear recollection of him. "It is their Eastern way, I suppose," she thought, "and I dare say Hormuz likes me too for his brother's sake. He treats me rather as a child! I dare say I seem so to him! I wonder shall I ever have any romance in my life! I hope so; but I hope too I am not a coquette by nature," she mused, for she warmly admired earnestness, constancy, loyalty, although a keener sense of fun than generally falls to the share of romantic young ladies often induced her to act flightily. So the Kharapet episode was dismissed from her mind for the present, with a brief resolution to make him talk rationally on some other subject than her own charms and perfections, and to ascertain if he knew any thing about her old favorites the Rosicrucians. "It is all very nice to be admired," was her concluding reflection on this head, "but one one wants variety! I dare say Hormuz Kharapet was in India during the Mutiny. I wonder if he had any 'hairbreadth escapes.' I will ask him to-morrow. I wonder what the jewels will be like. It is a shame not to give me the whole of them! Mr. Harding is very tiresome sometimes. I don't think he has quite so good a temper as I thought he had. Oh, gracious! it is half-past eleven. I shall not get half sleep enough." And Stasie prepared rapidly for bed.

## CHAPTER IV.

THE following day was clear and bright, and promised fair for the flower-show to which Mrs. Harding and Stasie were going. The morning passed delightfully for Stasie. First, two of her new dresses arrived, and stood the test of "trying on" triumphantly. Then Mr. Kharapet was announced, and entered, bearing an inlaid sandal-wood box. Mrs. Harding was writing, and Stasie busy dressing a doll for Ethel. The former smiled and held out her hand without rising, but Stasie came forward.

"Ah, Hormuz! you have kept your word, I see."

"I always try to do so. Here are a few of the more trifling articles bequeathed you by my late brother, and here,"—placing the box on the sofa, beside Stasie, and taking a small silken case from his breast pocket,—"this is a trifle from myself. Will you wear it for my sake, Stasie?" While he spoke he drew out a massive gold bangle and slipped it on her arm.

"O, thank you! a thousand thanks! Is it not lovely, Mrs. Harding! Oh, I will always wear it, Hormuz!"

"It is very massive," said Mrs. Harding, rising and coming over to look at the contents of the box, which Kharapet knelt down to open with a curious rude key. He exhibited a variety of brooches and clasps, four or five bracelets, a turquoise necklace, a few solid clumsy rings, all of rich yellow gold, studded with small rubies, emeralds, carbuncles, cat's-eyes, and pearls. Many of the stones were uncut, and all looked dull from their opaque setting, but to Stasie's unaccustomed eyes they seemed magnificent, and Kharapet assured her they were all valuable stones, carefully chosen. Lifting up the tray which contained these treasures, he then displayed another layer, consisting chiefly of gold ornaments, a beautifully chased classic-looking necklace, armlet, brooch, ear-rings, and clasp for the waist.

"These are far the best," said Mrs. Harding.

"They are quite lovely!" cried Stasie.

"And have additional value for you," said the Syrian; "for I find from my poor brother's memoranda that they were made for your mother, from the pattern of some antique ornaments found at Ctesiphon. I believe she wore them up to the time of her death.

My brother loved to see her richly attired."

Stasie's eyes filled up at the ideas suggested by his words. She lifted the necklace tenderly, and sat gazing at it, trying to recall her faintly-remembered mother, imagining the golden circlet round her fair throat—for she had been fair, that young mother! How Stasie longed to have her there with her, to protect and be protected!

"And that is all," said Kharapet, breaking the silence in which Stasie contemplated her new possessions. "There is an emerald necklace with a diamond pendant, some valuable rings, and other articles, which Mr. Harding thinks you had better not have at pre-

sent."

"Pray, at what time—" Stasie was beginning, when the door was opened by the smart parlor-maid, who presented a card, saying, "A lady for Miss Verner."

Stasie glanced at the card. "Miss C. Stretton!" she exclaimed.

"Show her up," said Mrs. Harding.

A tall lady entered—tall, not ungraceful, and much younger looking, Mrs. Harding thought, than she expected. She had good features, and a rather fixed expression of amiability; her hair was parted smoothly, and fell in a couple of curls behind each ear. She wore an abundantly-trimmed pale lavender dress, and a black silk mantle much befringed, neither looking very fresh. Her bonnet was a little top-heavy, with black lace and poppies; a veil and long lace lappets adding to her incumbrances.

She made an elegant courtesy on entering, and then approaching Stasie with a little run, exclaimed, "Ah!

my dear niece, I should have known you anywhere from your likeness to your dear mother! We were like sisters; for, though her aunt, there was a very little difference in our years!" Here Miss Stretton kissed Stasie, pushed her gently away, looked at her, shook her head, and wiped her eyes. "How the past comes back in gazing on you, dear child!"

"I am very glad to see you," said Stasie, blushing, and feeling a little awkward. Kharapet had quietly thrown a large silk pocket-handkerchief over the trinkets that lay spread out on the sofa, not, however, before Miss Stretton's quick but unsteady eyes glanced

curiously in their direction.

"Mrs. Harding, I presume?" continued Miss Stretton, with a graceful inclination, "and Mr. Kharapet. I presume, my dear niece, you have heard of my curious interview with this gentleman." She accepted the seat he offered as she spoke. "It was quite extraordinary,"-addressing Mrs. Harding,-"I have only just returned after an absence of two years on the Continent, and my attention was attracted by the advertisement of a meeting under the patronage of Lord Saintsbury and some of the leading clergy, where Mr. Kharapet, of Mardin, Syria, was to deliver an address. Thinking it was your excellent stepfather, Stasie, I determined to attend. You may imagine my surprise when this Mr. Kharapet came forward. I at once made up my mind to ask him for a few words of explanation, which he most courteously accorded, when I learned the sad bereavement you have sustained, my dear child, in the death of your kind protector. I have lost no time in coming to see if I can be of any use to my dear Anastasia's only girl, though I am sure she is happily placed with you, my dear madam?" she concluded suavely, but interrogatively, for she was not a little desirous of understanding her niece's position.
"You are very good," murmured Mrs. Harding.

"Oh! I am only on a visit here," exclaimed Stasie, who was pleased to see "any one belonging to her,"

as she phrased it, and beamed accordingly on her visitor. "I am still at school. Is it not a shame, at my age? I am trying to coax Mr. Harding and Mr. Kharapet to take me away, and let me live with Mrs. Mathews."

"Mrs. Mathews, ah!" returned Miss Stretton, compressing her lips and shaking her head, as if she "could a tale unfold;" catching Kharapet's eye he bent his

head as if in solemn acquiescence.

"What is the matter with Mrs. Mathews?" asked Stasie, looking from one to the other. "Is she ill?"

"No, no. There is really nothing the matter, my

dear. Mrs. Mathews is an excellent woman."

"I hope you will stay to luncheon," said Mrs. Harding politely. This gave an agreeable turn to the conversation.

Miss Stretton accepted the invitation readily, but declined Stasie's offer to "come up and take off her bonnet."

"In fact, I think it unwise for a lady of my time of life to dispense with the extraneous aid of cap or bonnet," she exclaimed with an amiable simper. "I shall therefore not remove my present head covering."

Luncheon was announced, and the children entering at the same time, a fresh strain of conversation was started, and Miss Stretton went into raptures over the beauty and grace of those "sweet little angels." She was lively and sympathetic in a remarkable degree all luncheon time: she detailed her own later adven-

tures at great length.

"You know, dear Mrs. Harding, I am one of those unhappy creatures, an unprotected female, and unfortunately an unprovided female also, at least to the lady of a merchant-prince like yourself I should seem penniless. Well, through the kind interest of my late father's good friend, the Bishop of Algoa, I was appointed companion and chaperon to two charming girls of fortune and distinction, with whom I have been traveling through France and Italy for the last

two years, the Misses Catchpole. They are the orphan daughters of an eminent shipowner, who left them very well off—in short, wealthy. The appointment was a very good one. We saw something of society, and I flatter myself I was of great use to the dear girls; but young people are apt to be influenced by evil example, and though they have not behaved to me exactly as—well as I should to them were our positions reversed, I shall always take an interest in them. Of course one cannot expect the refinement and highmindedness of real gentry from these sort of people, ahem!"—clearing her throat as she remembered the bourgeois character of her entertainers—"at the same time I am well aware that the middle class, I mean the upper middle class, is quite the bulwark of the nation."

"Real gratitude is rare in all grades," said Mrs. Harding, as Miss Stretton paused at the end of this long harangue. "Try another cutlet and a little more

hock. The ice to Miss Stretton, Jane."

"You are very kind. I will take another cutlet; they are exceedingly nice. After all, one finds nothing abroad to make up for the comfort and elegancies of an English house."

"You look thoughtful—you do not eat," said the Syrian in a low tone to Stasie. "Has any thing dis-

tressed you?"

"Who, me? oh, I have eaten very well, and I was

only thinking."

"A penny for your thoughts," said Johnnie, who sat

at the other side of Stasie.

"Dear little fellow, how clever and original," exclaimed Miss Stretton, who was evidently bent on making herself agreeable. "What do you think she was thinking of?"

"Oh, I am not sure; perhaps of those pretty things I saw Mr. Kharapet putting into a box just as we came

down to dinner."

"Or of my dolly; isn't it finished yet?" said little Ethel.

"Were you trying to remember your lesson, Stasie?" suggested Willie. "Johnnie always forgets his."

A house never can be dull with these treasures in it," cried Miss Stretton. "It is indeed a treat to a wanderer like myself to get a peep at such an interior. I do not wonder that my dear niece dislikes the idea of quitting it for the monotony of existence at school."

"Oh, I am not going to stay there long, am I, Hormuz? Mr. Kharapet and Mr. Harding are to arrange

some other residence for me." "Ah, indeed, and soon?"

"As soon as circumstances permit," returned Mrs. Harding. "It is not easy to find a suitable home for a young lady, even though the world's before her where to choose."

"Ah! very true, dear Mrs. Harding, very true," said Miss Stretton, with an air of profound conviction. Then turning to Kharapet, who was nearly opposite her, she addressed him with a fascinating smile and slight inclination of the head to one side, "I am sure you must feel exhausted; reaction must have set in after the excitement of yesterday. I assure you, Mrs. Harding, Mr. Kharapet's speech excited the greatest enthusiasm. The picture he drew of Eastern life and -and society, expanding under the influence of England, of intercourse with Englishmen, the spread of Evangelical truth under the glorious sky of Syria, the -the spiritual and temporal benefits which would flow from a union such as he described, was thrillingtouching. I observed several of the gentlemen on the platform were much affected."

Kharapet accepted the compliment gravely. It was hard, he said, to find language sufficiently forcible and expressive for the magnitude and importance of

his subject.

"You managed to find it, nevertheless, my dear sir. And Stasie, he quoted some beautiful little bits of Arabic poetry that sounded quite charming."

"How thrilling it must be to address a large crowd, and feel that you hold the people spell-bound!" cried Stasie, with an admiring glance at Kharapet. "Were I a man I would rather be an orator than any thing; being a woman, I should like to be a great actress!"

"Stasie!" exclaimed Kharapet, with a gesture of

horror, quite real.

"Ah, there spoke the innocent enthusiasm of

youth," said Miss Stretton.

"Does it frighten you to hear me talk of going on the stage?" cried Stasie mischievously to Kharapet. "As soon as I am one and twenty I shall make my debut."

Kharapet smiled, and was about to speak, but checked himself; and Mrs. Harding filled up the pause by advising Miss Stretton to try some cream with her gooseberry tart.

"Are you coming with us to the flower-show?" she

then asked Kharapet.

"If you will permit me—yes. When I was in London before I once saw one of those lovely shows, and I know not which were loveliest—the garden or the human flowers."

"Ah, Mr. Kharapet is, I see, an admirer of beauty," said Miss Stretton; "but I suppose our ladies must pale beside the greater loveliness of your Eastern

Houris."

Kharapet laughed softly. "We Christians of Syria do not believe in Houris, as you must be aware," he said; "and in beauty, as in most things, England is pre-eminent. Women in the East are, alas! degraded by ignorance—kept like children."

"But do you not consider learning—I should say instruction—waste of time for girls?" said Mrs. Harding quietly. "I think I heard Mr. Harding and yourself come to some such conclusion the other day  $\dot{\alpha}$ 

propos of Stasie and school."

"Nay, Mrs. Harding, you unintentionally misrepresent me. I do not think that charming young ladies

should be turned into learned professors, and their bright eyes dimmed by over-study. I should like them to be neither more nor less instructed than my dear niece there," a caressing prolonged glance from under his long lashes at Stasie as he spoke.

"Poor things," returned that young lady, laughing and coloring; "theirs would be but a short measure

of learning."

"I don't think there is much good in lessons. I hate going to school," remarked Master Johnnie, who was painfully idle.

"I can read all Andersen's fairy tales," said Willie

with some pride.

"Oh, you are a baby!" cried his brother con-

temptuously.

"I am sorry to disturb you, Stasie, but you had better go and dress; I should like to see the flowers while we can get near them," observed Mrs. Harding.

Stasie rose, looked at Miss Stretton, and hesitated. "May I come with you and assist at your toilette, my dear," she said, in reply to the look. "I delight in seeing nice young creatures well dressed; and for the daughter of your dear mother my interest is tenfold. Moreover, I am not without taste, I flatter myself. May I come?"

"Oh, certainly, Miss—"

"Pray call me auntie; there is something touching in the appellation," interrupted Miss Stretton; "and I imagine we two are the sole surviving members of a once numerous family;" she put her handkerchief to her eyes, and Stasie heartily responding to the appeal, exclaimed—"Come then, auntie, and thank you. I am sure that some fairy godmother has been in a good humor with me of late to send me a nice auntie and a kind delightful uncle"—a smile and wave of the hand to Kharapet, as she left the room preceded by her newfound relative.

Kharapet, who had risen with the rest, stood an instant silent, his hands pressed over his heart, a look of

rapture lighting up his sallow face and deep

eves.

Mrs. Harding smiled as she assisted little Ethel from her chair, and let her run away after her brothers. Kharapet caught the slightly cynical expression, and exclaimed, "Ah, madam, I fear I have never succeeded in winning your friendship, highly though I would value it; you do not, I fear, look favorably on the deep, intense affection which woke in my heart almost at the first sight of that sweet but friendless girl. Providence has, I believe, guided my steps to be the fond protector of her and of her property, which will be precious to me because it is hers. Why, my dear Mrs. Harding, does not your husband's trusted friend find favor in your eyes?"

"My favor is of small importance, Mr. Kharapet: and as to Stasie, young ladies with good fortunes seldom lack either friends or lovers. She, however, is fair enough, and I think good enough, to deserve both for herself alone, yet——" she paused.
"Yet," repeated Kharapet, "I pray you, continue;

you have stopped some word that would enlighten me as to your real views. I do beseech you, speak!"

Mrs. Harding's pale cheek flushed faintly; she hesitated, and then said, "I am very foolish to give an opinion on what does not concern me, and if Mr. Harding knew it he would scold me; nevertheless, I will say that I think Stasie would be happier as the wife of an Englishman, and you as the husband of one of your own countrywomen, notwithstanding your admiration for the learning and accomplishments of ours."

"You are wrong, dear lady, you are wrong; my life's devotion will secure your young friend's happiness, and-you do not for a moment think I would betray a confidential word?"

"My opinions are of little moment," she replied; "only I warn you not to be too confident—too secure

of success."

She bowed and left the room. Kharapet looked after her, the words "an enemy—an obstacle," form-

ing themselves in his brain.

While Mrs. Harding, slowly mounting the stairs to her dressing-room, murmured to herself, "Betray! Yes; in the very first tête-à-tête with a full exposition of how I tried to make him understand he was not to tell my husband. Shall I always be an outspoken fool! After all these years of bitter training!"

Meanwhile no misgivings or distrust darkened the joyousness with which Stasie attired herself. She was greatly attracted by the sympathy her aunt evinced, and the pleasantly-implied admiration of herself and her belongings which that lady contrived not too openly to convey. I will not say much about her toilette, because some, if not all, my young readers might shriek if I described too accurately a blue-andwhite French muslin dress, flounced, but not draped, worn over a crinoline, with a handsome sash tied behind; a very small bonnet of lace and forget-me-nots resting on her wavy, abundant hair, which was not cut in a fringe, but simply parted and smoothed back as well as its rebellious richness would permit; and a black lace mantlet, shrouding, but not hiding, her pliant figure. Stasie, however, was highly pleased with herself and her toilette. Never had she possessed any thing half so smart before.

"Very nice, indeed; most becoming," said Miss Stretton. "I shall really be quite proud of my niece! You will come and see me, dear, will you not? After all, it is pleasanter for near relatives like ourselves to meet uninterrupted by comparative strangers. I have a very humble little lodging, though not ungenteel, in Stafford Place, Westbourne Grove, where I shall be happy to receive you; and it may be a comfort to you to discuss your plans with one who would fain be a

second mother to you, my poor lonely child."

"Thank you. How good you are! I will come the day after to-morrow,"

"Very well, dear; the day after to-morrow, then. Come early and share my simple fare. A hearty welcome must atone for the absence of luxuries such as you are accustomed to here."

"Oh, I don't care a straw about them. I only care

to have just one or two people to love me."

"Ah, my dear Stasie, you will find plenty whose fair seeming may deceive and flatter. Youth, good looks, a fine fortune—these things command success; but I trust the instinct of a noble heart will teach you whom to trust."

"I don't think people are so bad after all, auntie.

And have I a fine fortune? How much?"

"My dear, don't you know? I haven't an idea! It is a shame to keep you in the dark. You really ought to be informed. You are quite old enough to understand your own position. Now those beautiful things on the sofa which Mr. Kharapet covered over so carefully as I came in, were they his gifts or your own property?"

"They are mine-some of what were left me by

poor, Papa Kharapet."

"Why don't you wear some of them to-day? I see

you have no jewelry?"

"No, I do not care for it in the morning; and as Mr. Kharapet did not absolutely give me the box, I do not like to send a servant for it."

"I see you are ready. Shall we come down-stairs? I must say adieu to Mrs. Harding before I go. You

find her a pleasant friend, eh?"

"Oh, she is delightful, and so kind!"

"That's well; and this Mr. Kharapet—what a handsome man! He seems quite devoted to you, dear! I could not believe he was brother to your good stepfather. Why, he is young enough to have been his son! Ah, my dear Stasie, what a sacrifice your precious mother made for you in marrying that poor old Turk! I mean, not a Turk exactly—that would have been too improper. I am sure you ought to

love any one belonging to her after all she went through for your sake; but she has had her reward. Let us go down, dear. Trust me. I shall never rest until I find out *all* about every thing, and let you know."

## CHAPTER V.

THE flower-show was very brilliant, both as regarded flowers and company. Stasie was exhilarated and excited; the delicious perfume of the trodden grass, the soft rustle and continuous murmur of the well-dressed crowd, the stirring sounds of the Guards' band, made her feel as if suddenly lifted into a region of beauty and elegance worthy the romance in which she always vaguely anticipated one day to play a part.

The fact that a hundred lovely toilettes eclipsed her own caused her no discomfort—she felt so happy, so hopeful, that she could afford to be disinterested.

"Who is that beautiful woman in fawn satin, with poppies in her bonnet, Mrs. Harding?" she asked

presently.

"I don't know, Stasie. I know very few people. Mr. Kharapet can tell us more—he is quite in the gay world."

"Mr. Kharapet has stopped to talk to a lady. Why,

it is Lady Elizabeth Wyatt!"

"Is it?" said Mrs. Harding, turning to look. "I

have never met her; she seems most gracious."

While they looked, Kharapet, who was speaking with an air of the profoundest deference, made a slight wave of his hand in their direction, and Lady Elizabeth walked over to where they stood.

"Allow me to present my good friend, Mrs. Harding, to your ladyship," said Kharapet with a deep bow.

"You are already acquainted with Miss Verner, I

believe."

"Very happy to make your acquaintance, Mrs. Harding," said Lady Elizabeth politely, but with a slight tinge of patronage. "I have heard Mr Wyatt speak of your husband as having been most useful to him during his Oriental wanderings. Mr. Wyatt, you know, has made the cause of India and our Eastern fellow-Christians his own. Miss Verner! It is some time since I had the pleasure of seeing you; and really you have grown—grown considerably. You are quite a young lady. Pray, how old are you? I presume I may ask?"

"Oh yes, Lady Elizabeth. I shall be eighteen next

month.'

"Eighteen! Why, it is time you should be introduced into society. I am sure your kind friend Mrs. Harding will undertake that task. By the by, I have a conversazione on the 20th. I will send you cards. Mr. Kharapet is coming, of course. Mr. Kharapet is quite *l'enfant gaté* of our set just at present; and I shall have the pleasure of calling on you, Mrs. Harding. Is Miss Verner going to reside with you?"

"There is nothing decided as to Miss Verner's future abode," replied Mrs. Harding. "Mr. Wyatt's approval is requisite before any final arrangement be

made."

"Of course, of course! I assure you, Mr. Wyatt takes a warm interest in his young ward; but as you can imagine, with such numerous and important claims upon his time he has not much to spare even for those with whom he is personally Lié. Shall we move on? there are some lovely azaleas and pelargoniums in the larger tent. Tell me, my dear Mr. Kharapet, is it true that you are to be presented to the Prince of Wales on Tuesday? It would be most desirable both as a means of increasing your importance in the estimation of the various meetings which I hear you are to address, and

also it will be to the credit of the Prince to interest

himself in your project."

With another reverence Kharapet explained that the rumor was quite unfounded,—adding with much humility that he did not look for such distinction.

"But why not, my dear sir? Why not?" returned Lady Elizabeth, who hardly stopped to hear his answer. "Highly esteemed as you are by Mr. Wyatt, and that dear, good Lord Saintsbury! though I regret that my husband and myself do not quite agree with him on the question of this rapprochement of the churches. My views are—though I say it myself—wider; and I do not see how any form of Protestantism can suit the climate, soil, and—and—natural productions of the East! You want something gorgeous, glowing, and all that sort of thing. I am for Protestantism 'pure et simple.' The merest whitewashed barn vivified by the inspired eloquence of a preacher! the deep faith of a congregation! but in Europe—Northern Europe! Whitewash will never do in the East, will it, Mrs. Harding?"

Mrs. Harding said she supposed not, and Stasie

kept her countenance with some difficulty.

"And pray, my dear Miss Verner, have you made great progress at school? Have you any idea of going in for these new examinations? Do you take to music or to art?"

"Neither, I am afraid, Lady Elizabeth. I have not

made much progress in any thing."

"How is that? You really don't look by any means stupid! You must come to luncheon with me some day, and I shall soon find out what your abilities are in the musical and other lines."

"I am sure you will very soon," said Stasie good-

humoredly.

Lady Elizabeth had a way of talking herself out of breath, then making a little gasp and rushing on again. She now took up the thread of her discourse by exclaiming: "There is Lady Loftus, one of the most energetic and benevolent women in London. Come, Mr. Kharapet, I must introduce you to Lady Loftus. Au revoir, Mrs. Harding; I will not forget the cards for my conversazione." So saying, she hurried away on Kharapet's arm.

Mrs. Harding and Stasie passed on slowly, enjoying

the beauty and fragrance of the flowers.

"I think a back-bone must have been omitted when Mr. Kharapet's mortal frame was put together," said Mrs. Harding with a smile. "I never saw any thing like his bows."

"I suppose Eastern politeness is very punctilious," replied Stasie thoughtfully; "but he certainly bows

gracefully."

"You think so? I am not a fair judge. I do not

like any thing 'Oriental.'"

"I have observed that," returned Stasie; "but why? You give me the idea of being too calm and reasonable for prejudice."

"I wish I were, Stasie; but I am afraid you have not yet had a key to the enigma of my profound char-

acter."

"Yet I fancy I know you pretty well, dear Mrs. Harding. Do you think we shall dance at Lady Elizabeth's party?"

"I am afraid not."

"What is the use of giving a party if there is to be no dancing?"

"There are heaps of parties in London where people

don't dance."

Here some other acquaintance spoke to Mrs. Hard-

ing, and they mixed with the crowd.

It was some time before Kharapet joined them, but when he did, there was an air of exultation in his look and bearing, though he tried hard to suppress it.

"I have been detained," he said to Stasie in a tone of apology, "longer than I expected; but Lady Loftus was pleased to interest herself in my project. And, moreover, she addressed some flattering observations

and queries to me respecting yourself. Her words were precious—"

"Oh! what did she say, Hormuz? Do tell me, it is

so nice to be praised."

"She said, 'Is that Mr. Wyatt's ward? She is handsome, very handsome, and really looks like a gentlewoman.' And then she added some words which I will tell you another time, if I may."

"Ah! that is because they were not pleasant! I do

not want to hear any more."

"I trust you will not think them unpleasant."

But Stasie's attention was now attracted in another direction. "Isn't that waltz delicious?" she exclaimed. "I wish I could dance to it. Do you like dancing, Hormuz?"

"Dancing? no. That is not our taste, and it is one of the few points in which I cannot agree with English ideas. It would be agony to see you whirling round

in another man's arms—agony!"

"What nonsense!" said Stasie, coloring deeply, with an odd sensation of offense, of being revolted. "Why do you say such disagreeable things? If we should dance at Lady Elizabeth's party you will have to undergo a good deal of agony, for I shall dance every time I have a chance!"

"You are a true woman, Stasie—loving power and

using it to torture!"

Stasie looked straight into his face with her frank, fearless eyes, and burst into a fit of natural healthy laughter. "Well, Hormuz," she said, "though you do not like the theater, you are a good actor!"

"Actor!" repeated Hormuz, puzzled. "Do you not perceive the difference between reality and

acting?"

"Hardly," returned Stasie. "Come, we shall lose Mrs. Harding."

The next morning brought a total change of weather.

Mr. Harding had an engagement at home, and was glad to delay his departure till the rain had somewhat cleared. He was certainly in a bad humor—first evinced by finding fault with his curry, rejecting the toasted bacon, and denouncing the poached eggs. Then Johnnie, who, as having reached the years of comparative discretion, breakfasted down-stairs, having eaten plentifully, demanded more curry. His mother refused it, whereupon Mr. Harding, with rough impatience, exclaimed, "What bosh! Let the child have enough to eat. I don't want to see him skin and bone to suit your refined taste! Here, my boy, pass over your plate." He piled it with rice and curry. "If you can eat that stuff, eat it."

The boy chuckled. "It is very good, papa! quite

as good as it was yesterday."

"Well, eat it then, and hold your tongue! I am glad it will not be all wasted, as so much is in my house! Stasie, when you have a husband and a house of your own, I hope you will not let things run to rack and ruin."

"I hope not," said Stasie, with an uneasy glance at Mrs. Harding. "But I am sure I shall never manage

better than Mrs. Harding."

The husband laughed a harsh scornful laugh, and took up the paper. There was a few minutes' silence broken by the entrance of the parlor-maid with a note. "For Miss Verner," she said. "A young gentleman left it."

"It is from Ella Mathews," cried Stasie, with much interest, after she had glanced at the contents. "I suppose Bob left it. She wants to see me very much; she says she has a great deal to tell me. Something has evidently happened; I must go to-day. There is nothing particular to be done, is there, Mrs. Harding?"

"I think not," replied that lady.

"You will not go in such weather," said Mr. Harding, looking up from his paper. "And who the deuce is 'Bob'?"

"Oh! he is Mrs. Mathews' second son; the one that is to be a doctor."

"Hum, a medical student! The biggest scamps

out."

"I am afraid he is not very steady," said Stasie; but I believe he is better than he used to be."

"Not a very nice acquaintance for you," growled

Mr. Harding.

"Acquaintance!" echoed Stasie, laughing. "Why, he is like a brother to me; not a favorite brother, I confess. You forget that I know no other home than Mrs. Mathews'!"

"The sooner you forget it the better," said Mr. Harding, resuming his paper, "or you will find the

whole party a millstone round your neck."

"You are not in earnest," cried Stasie, opening her eyes with amazement. "You can't think I could be so worthless!"

Mr. Harding made no reply, and Stasie caught a warning look from Mrs. Harding, which suggested the prudence of dropping the subject. After a few moments' uneasy silence she said, "I promised Ethel and Willie to read to them, as they are not able to go out; I dare say they are waiting for me," and left the room unheeded by her host.

Mr. Harding's tone chafed her beyond what his words seemed to merit. "Is it possible," she asked herself, as she mounted the stair, "that under his good humor and bonhommie lurks an ill-tempered brute? that is the reason perhaps that Mrs. Harding is so pale and quiet! Perhaps it is only a passing fit of irritation. Men have a great deal to trouble them out-of-doors. Still, worries or no worries, I am afraid I should have a bitter battle with a husband who spoke to me like that."

Meantime Mr. Harding threw down his paper and drummed for a minute with his large heavy fingers on the table; then, addressing his wife, he burst out—

"You are about as great a blunderer as ever lived,

in spite of your education and refinement, and all that bosh!" looking at her while he spoke with fierce anger, which he evidently did not take the trouble to conceal or to control.

"What has been my last blunder?" asked Mrs.

Harding, a slight quiver moving her lips.

"Oh! you need not try to bamboozle me; it's not to be done! I can see plain enough you are going against me and Kharapet about that girl, and it's all a —blank—blank nuisance."

"Mr. Kharapet has been complaining of me, I sup-

pose?"

"Not he! he never said any thing about it. Don't you think I can see for myself? Now you had better leave it alone. That fellow Kharapet has taken a mad fancy to the girl, and we had better not interfere with him. I confess I never expected such an upshot; but his position gives him a good deal of power, and he might make things disagreeable for us, and for her too. If I hadn't put myself out of the running years ago, he shouldn't have had it all his own way, by Jove! I'd have cut him out. You don't find a fine girl with a fine fortune every day, and I am pretty sure to have distanced him."

"It is much to be regretted that you are not free to try

your chance," said his wife in a low voice.

"Well, that can't be helped now. I know I made a fool of myself, but I would not mind if you would give that care to my comforts and interests I have a right to expect."

Mrs. Harding folded up her table napkin in silence; and after finishing the remainder of his cup of tea, Mr.

Harding resumed-

"So mind you don't make a fool of yourself, but back up Kharapet all you can. Try and put that obstinate girl off her whim of going to see those beggarly Mathews people; there is a blank cub of a son there, and they will be trying to snap her up for him. Do you think she has any hankering that way?"

"I know nothing of Stasie's inclinations. She seems to me too light-hearted—too frank—to be troubled

with sentimental feeling."

"Hum! women are so infernally cunning. What's that?" The front-door bell sounded. "I hope it's not that fellow Kharapet. I don't want him here philandering every hour of the day; it's enough to make a dog sick."

Here the parlor-maid entered with a card. "The

gentleman wishes to see you."

"Oh, Mr. Williams, the solicitor to the Sefton Park Building Company. Have you shown him into the library?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Harding rose, brushed the crumbs from his waistcoat, twirled his mustaches, and walked into the next room, whence Mrs. Harding could hear him exclaim in his heartiest and most cordial voice, "Williams! very glad to see you, my dear fellow."

Stasie had finished the story she promised to read to her little friends, and was in her own room selecting a suitable present for Ella among the treasures she had received the day before, when Mrs. Harding tapped at the door; there was a suspicious red recently-bathed look about her eyes, which Stasie quickly observed, and drew her own conclusions.

"Oh, Mrs. Harding, which of these brooches do

you think Ella would like?"

"I cannot possibly say, dear. I never even saw the young lady."

"Well, which would you like yourself?"

"I do not like either much, though they are valuable; still there is nothing prettier. I am not fond of Eastern jewelry, or anything Eastern indeed."

"Are you not? I have rather romantic ideas of the East; there is something weird and mysterious even

in the words Eastern and Oriental."

"Stasie, dear, I wish you would give up this expedi-

tion to Islington. It irritates Mr. Harding, and would

annoy Mr. Kharapet."

"Mr. Kharapet, indeed," cried Stasie, putting down the brooches with a slap on the dressing-table. "Tell me, does it vex you?"

"Me? no. I am not at all opposed to your going,

but I have been sent to dissuade you."

"I thought so," said Stasie, sitting down and beginning to put on her boots energetically. "Well, I shall get off as fast as I can. Why should Mr. Harding object to my going to my oldest and, except yourself, my best friends? Does he think he will persuade me to cut them?"

"For one thing, Stasie, it is hardly right that you

should go alone all that way."

"Why not, Mrs. Harding?"—(diving into a bonnet-box and taking out her hat)—"I am sure I have gone often enough from Islington to the Circus, and from Forest Hill home, before Mr. Kharapet came here to make a fuss. I know my way, and I am sure I am quiet enough."

"Yes, I know you are; but if you wait for a day or

two I will go with you myself."

"No, dear Mrs. Harding, you will not: you wouldn't be let, I see that; and I should just be drawn on from day to day, and have to go back to school without seeing Mrs. Mathews. I should be angry with you for coming here to prevent my going, only I think I understand—" here Stasie broke off suddenly and kissed Mrs. Harding.

"My husband is right, you are obstinate," said the latter with a smile and slight increase of color. "Come back as early as you can." Mr. Kharapet dines with us

to-day, and you must pacify both gentlemen."

"I think I shall manage Mr. Kharapet at any rate,"

said Stasie fixing on her hat with some care.

"Take my advice on one point," resumed Mrs. Harding; "take your gift to Miss Mathews, but say nothing about it; it will save talk and trouble."

"But why? are not the things my own, and can I not dispose of them as I choose?" cried Stasie, with an angry sparkle in her eyes.

"You are under age, dear, and you have to deal with

men who do not understand the joys of giving."

"I am sure Mr. Kharapet does. What a lovely gold bangle he has given me!"

"True, yet---"

"Well, dear Mrs. Harding, I will say nothing now until I have talked more to you; but if there is to be any difficulty about it I will take Mrs. Mathews and Janet a present too. Why, I shall never want half those things."

"Do not be so hasty: believe me, a woman's only

safe line is craft and conciliation."

"Oh, Mrs. Harding!" indignantly, "I cannot believe *that*; it is too humiliating. What a horrible idea of life. I may try to be conciliating, but I will never be crafty. Now, will you help me on with my waterproof? Is Mr. Harding in the dining room?"

"No, he has gone out with a gentleman; so you are

quite safe."

"Safe!" cried Stasie, "I was just going down to

ask if he would come with me to find a cab.'

Mrs. Harding stared; Stasie burst out laughing, gave her a hasty kiss, ran down-stairs, and soon the sound of the front door closing told that she had left the house.

Mrs. Harding went to the window, and saw the rebel step into a cab. She looked kindly, sadly, enviously, after the tall slight figure whose springy

step bespoke hope and energy.

Then the watcher's misty thoughts rolled slowly away, leaving the background of the past clear and sharp, like a distant landscape in the intervals of sudden showers. Her own quiet happy girlhood in a country vicarage came vividly before her. Its homely pleasures, its poverty and self-denial; its hearty affection and passing quarrels; the first dawn of love

for a student cousin, obliterated first by separation, and then by the ardent suit of her husband; the bright hopes, the warm liking and gratitude with which she accepted him; the contentment of her parents, the exultation of her sister at her promising marriage. How vividly it all came back to her! and also the quick, dreadful awakening - the rapidly - growing knowledge that she was wedded to a human animal, to whom she was a mere possession, with whom companionship was impossible, and whom even tolerance could scarce make bearable. In the familiarity of married life it was hard to say which mood was the most repellent - coarse good humor or fierce and brutal anger. But the indissoluble link was securely forged, and Mrs. Harding knew that in silence and endurance she must wear out her life! Then came the death of an old uncle, from whom her husband, rather than herself, had "great expectations," and whose will had disappointed them, since which time Harding had shown more and more clearly that he looked upon his marriage as a sad mistake—the fatal result of temporary weakness.

As to her own dear home, how rarely she had been able to visit it! and when she did, the impossibility of speaking frankly, out of the fullness of her heart, respecting her married life, robbed her brief breathing space of its charm and healing. How weary to look back at her ten or eleven years of married life; and if it was less weary to look forward it was because that future had ceased to be hers, and had passed into the possession of her children, therefore a gleam of hope shimmered over the dark cloudy abyss of coming years. Ardently she wished that Stasie's might be a different fate, and thought with satisfaction of the girl's brave, if rather impetuous, spirit. "Yet the bravest must give way to the wear of perpetual opposition, continual detraction, if not strong enough to silence or trample it down, and I am so weak!"

No regrets or reminiscences, however, clouded

Stasie's heart as she sped onwards to Islington, rather a sense of pleasant exhilaration at having defied Mr. Harding, in which was quite as much of girlish fun as

self-will.

"Why should I trouble myself too much about Mr. Harding!" she thought; "Hormuz Kharapet will back me up, and I am not doing any thing out of the way or unreasonable. I will not let him or any one else frighten me into a nonenity. I am afraid Mr. Harding is not such a good fellow as he seems. If Mrs. Harding was quite happy, would she recommend 'craft'? Pooh! I am not obliged to submit to any one."

Mrs. Harding waited with some anxiety for her young protégée's return, and as dinner hour approached, became nervously fearful lest Mr. Harding and Kharapet should arrive before her. To her great relief she was informed that "Miss Verner had come in and gone to her room at once," just before a peal of the front-door bell announced Mr. Harding's advent. Kharapet came with him, and no inquiries were made respecting the rebel.

Although Stasie had carried out her own desire, it struck Mrs. Harding that she looked fatigued and depressed. Nothing, however, was said on that or any other subject of interest until the servants had left the room after dinner, when Mr. Harding, who seemed to have completely regained good humor and placidity, remarked, while filling her glass with claret, "So you have got back safe and sound, Stasie? Did you meet

with any adventures?"

"I must entreat you, Stasie," exclaimed Kharapet, who had been remarkably taciturn and grave of aspect during dinner, "not again to go about in this independent manner. It is not meet for a young lady of your or any position to go forth quite alone, especially in a great town. Had Mr. Harding informed me a

little earlier of your intention, I should have gone to seek and bring you back. Surely there is a want of

delicacy in such daring?"

Stasie flushed crimson. If she loved praise, so she resented blame. "You know nothing about English girls, Mr. Kharapet!" she replied hastily, "nor English life. I should be sorry to think London was such an uncivilized place that a girl could not go about alone! Why should you and Mr. Harding make a fuss now, when all the years of my life before no one ever cared how I came and went? How often have I come here from Forest Hill alone, or the greater part of the way alone, and nobody ran away with me? I should like to see any one try!"

Kharapet looked at her with a curious sidelong

glance, half admiration, half alarm.

"Ah! you've a spirit of your own, and no ristake; but if I were young and free I think I'd try the running away. I am sure you are well worth the trouble!" cried Mr. Harding.

"I think you are very tired, Stasie," said Mrs. Hard-

ing gently; "you look weary."

"No, not tired exactly; but I am a little cast down, for I am going to lose my good friends; Mrs. Mathews is going away."

"How is that?" said Harding rather eagerly, while

Kharapet looked up with evident interest.

"Mr. Baldwin—that is the gentleman Ella Mathews is engaged to—has been appointed one of the masters of a big proprietory school or college at C—, so they are to be married soon; and Mrs. Mathews is going to give up her house and go to C— too, where she intends to take boys to board, and they are all in such good spirits. I feel a wretch for being sorry! and yet I am very sorry, for they will be lost to me! Ella will, of course, be taken up with her husband, and I can't say I should like to be in the house with a parcel of boys!"

"Ah! that's capital for the Mathews family,

though," said Mr. Harding, with an air of satisfaction; "the old missionary didn't leave them too well off."

"Have you ever seen the fiance?" asked Mrs.

Harding.

"Oh yes! often before I went to school. He was a great friend of Harry Mathews', and used often to

come into tea and supper."

Kharapet offered a silent thanksgiving that Ella Mathews' "young man" did not know of Stasie's fortune, as the Syrian never doubted the result of fuller information.

There was a pause, during which Mr. Harding filled himself a glass of port, and pushed the apricots towards Kharapet. Stasie meantime colored, grew paler, and fidgeted with her napkin. At last she broke out, "There is something I want to do so much, if you and Mr. Kharapet will let me; and I am sure you will, because it is only right!"

Mrs. Harding smiled. "Come, out with it, Stasie, J

see you are half afraid of your own proposition."

"That is because I am a goose," she exclaimed; "I surely have a right to ask for something of my own?"

"My dear," said Mr. Harding, "you may ask any

thing you like."

"I understand," returned Stasie, with a smile and nod. "Well, you see it will be very costly to poor Mrs. Mathews this moving, though she hopes to get on ever so much better when she is settled; and then she has to give Bob money, because he is to stay in London."

"And who is 'Bob'?" asked Kharapet.

"Oh! the second boy; he is a medical student. Now, as I lived so long with them, and Mrs. Mathews was quite like a mother to me, I should like to give her a little present—something useful."

"Pray, what do you think of giving?" asked Mr. Harding in a peculiar tone, while Kharapet kept pro-

found silence.

"Well, there is nothing so useful as money, and—and I think a hundred pounds would be a great help."

Mr. Harding burst into a loud fit of laughter, and Kharapet breathed the words, "a hundred pounds! eighty-six Mohammed Shah Kerans," in an awe-struck tone.

Stasie was dreadfully confused by this way of taking her daring suggestion, but she was true and staunch, and rallied her forces to repeat the attack.

"Do, dear Mr. Harding, tell me how much money I have, and then I shall know what I may give. Surely, if I am well off, and Ella tells me I am, I can

spare a hundred pounds?"

"Miss Ella Mathews is a confounded chatterbox," said Mr. Harding sharply. "I can tell you, Stasie, you are not rich enough to scatter your money about in that fashion, and, by Jove, you shall not, while Kharapet and I have hold of it. When you are your own mistress you may make ducks and drakes of it, and you will too if you haven't the sense to hear reason."

"But a hundred pounds is not much, and as it is my own money, it can only matter to myself. It can make no difference to you! and I shall be so very

very much obliged to you!"

Mr. Harding laughed again, but less unpleasantly.

"My dear child! you don't know what you are talking about! Why, I dare not give you your own money—I'd have the guardian down upon me! We can do nothing without his consent; and he would think Kharapet and myself off our heads if we proposed such a scheme. It is simply and completely out of the question, ain't it, Kharapet?"

"It is so utterly unheard of and foolish, and—and wicked," cried Kharapet, almost stuttering in his eager denunciation of poor Stasie's outrageous idea, "that I doubt if it could have originated with Stasie herself! Confess now that these good people suggested this liberality." He bent his head slightly to one side,

pressing his hands together, and looking with a slow

insinuating smile into Stasie's eyes.

"They did nothing of the kind," she cried, firing up. "How can you have such mean thoughts? Mrs. Mathews and Ella are incapable of asking for money—quite as incapable as you are yourself! I wish you would remember the Mathewses are my friends—my best friends—when I had no one else to care for me."

"A care that was always well paid for," put in Mr.

Harding.

"And what is the use of having money if I cannot help them," continued Stasie, flashing just one angry contemptuous glance by way of answer at Mr. Harding.

"You will find the use of it all in good time," he returned coolly; "but for the present what you want is out of the question, and there is an end of it."

"Do you not think that if it were possible, I should not try to meet your wishes?" said Kharapet sooth-

ingly.

Stasie was silent. In fact, anger and disappointment were almost too much for her. She felt the hot tears ready to fall, but fearing the species of contemptuous indulgence with which they would be received,

she mastered her emotion by a stout effort.

"If it cannot be, why, I must say no more," said she, at last, with downcast eyes, crimson cheeks, and throbbing breast, and kept profound silence till Mrs. Harding made a move to leave the room, when she escaped to her own, and enjoyed the luxury of a good cry, calling Mr. Harding by some very bad names in her heart.

## CHAPTER VI.

LADY ELIZABETH WYATT'S house in C- Street, Mayfair, was old-fashioned and roomy, but not imposing, its furniture and decorations by no means costly or elegant; yet her rooms looked like the dwelling of a gentlewoman, and had a character of their own, from the number of curiosities and specimens of various arts and manufactures profusely scattered about. The aspect of the company was equally cosmopolitan, for Mr. Percy Wyatt was exceedingly liberal. both politically and socially, and all sorts and conditions, both of men and women, were wont to assemble at Lady Elizabeth's conversaziones. To Stasie, however, all seemed very grand and a little alarming. The staircase was bordered with flowering shrubs, and crowded with gayly-dressed people. It was some time before Mrs. Harding and her young friend could effect an entrance into the room where Lady Elizabeth stood to receive her guests. Kharapet, who of course accompanied them, was of litle use in a crowd of this or of any description. He was disposed to yield to pressure, to bow and back, and make way for every one, and it was by her own exertions and quiet perseverance that Mrs. Harding at last reached the lady of the house.

"Ah! Mrs. Harding—Miss Verner! very glad to see you. Are you not late? and where is Mr. Harding?"

"He rarely goes out of an evening, Lady Elizabeth, and we have been some time making our way so far."

"No doubt; we are rather crowded to-night. Have you had tea? Mr. Kharapet, the Duchess of Pembroke desired me to present you to her; she heard you speak at Lord Saintsbury's meeting, and was quite pleased: she is in the next room. Mrs. Harding, we must find a seat for you, or would you like to look at

some very curious specimens of Lapland work with fish-bones and dried sea-weed? They were presented to Mr. Wyatt by those most interesting people who were here last autumn. Mr. Metcalf," to a pale, slim, typical evening-party young man, "Mr. Metcalf—Mrs. Harding—Miss Verner; pray take these ladies to see the Lapland work, and those new photographs. I congratulate you on your dress, Miss Verner,"—coolly viewing her through her eye-glass; "it is in good taste; you are looking very nice—really very nice!" "Thank you," said Stasie, laughing.

"Come, Mr. Kharapet," continued her ladyship, "the Duchess will be going immediately, she only looked in *en route* to the Princess's concert;" and Kharapet, bowing profoundly, followed her with a bland and

beatific expression of countenance.

"If you will take care of Miss Verner I will follow you," said Mrs. Harding, as the pale young man hesitated how to divide himself, and they proceeded slowly in the opposite direction to that in which Lady

Elizabeth had carried off Kharapet.

The loud buzz of conversation, the warm perfumed atmosphere, the multitude of strange faces, pro duced a bewildering effect upon Stasie; she fancied every other person against whom they brushed must be a celebrity, and she burned to know who was who, but hesitated to ask her cavalier, to whom she felt by no means attracted. Meantime, he seemed somewhat at a loss for conversation. He asked if she had heard Trebelli in Lucrezia, or Giulini in Martha? or if she had attended any of Dickens's readings? to all of which Stasie replied in the negative, whereupon a pause ensued, broken at length by Mr. Metcalf remarking languidly, "Wonderful woman, Lady Elizabeth! she collects the largest amount of curiosities, animate and inanimate, to be met with any where."

"Yes, I should like to know who they are," said Stasie eagerly. "I have never been here before. Do

tell me who some of them are?"

"I do not know the half of them; but there, that lady with the towsled hair and a red velvet bodice is Miss Malcolm, the famous women's rights woman, and the bald man in spectacles is the celebrated Tomkins, the philanthropist," etc., etc.; and he continued to pour forth a large amount of information which yet did not greatly enlighten his hearer, who felt a not unusual degree of disappointment at the aspect of the various "famous" and "renowned" individuals pointed out.

"But are there no other really remarkable people here?" said Stasie at length, after they had inspected some queer, dingy-looking, oddly-shaped garments,

covered with a kind of entangled pattern.

"I should like to see some of the great writers or artists, or Lord Lytton or Millais, or Jefferson the actor. Oh, I *should* like to see him—shouldn't you, Mrs. Harding?"

But Mrs. Harding had turned to speak to an ac-

quaintance and did not hear.

"I don't think you meet with so many literary and artistic people here as you do travelers and distinguished foreigners, and—and starters of new movements and all that sort of thing," returned the pale young man vaguely. "Here is a seat, Miss—a—two seats, and I am afraid I must wish you good-evening; I am going on to Mrs. Parkins de Parkyns's dance. Know the de Parkynses? Charming people—enormously rich—sorry I am engaged—a—good evening."

Stasie sat down, feeling a little desolate for the

moment.

Mrs. Harding seemed absorbed in her conversation with a white-haired, dignified, clerical-looking old gentleman, and for the moment oblivious of her charge.

Looking round for some object of interest, Stasie's attention was arrested by a gentleman near the door, who was speaking to a fat old lady in a towering head-

dress of lace and feathers.

A tall gentleman—tall and large framed, though spare. A well-shaped head, short wavy, almost black hair, a dark complexion, a firm chin clean shaved, long mustaches, heavy eyebrows, and somewhat sunken temples. These do not sound like the items of a handsome whole, nor was the object of Stasie's notice a handsome man, yet he interested her more than any of the celebrities who had been pointed out.

There was a composed steadfastness in his look—an air of repose in his attitude that pleased Stasie's rather vivid fancy; and she amused herself by imagining to what class of celebrity this tall gentleman might belong. He was not a poet, she felt sure; there was nothing at all dreamy in his aspect. If a littérateur, he must be a historian, an essayist, or a political economist; perhaps he was an explorer of strange lands, or a "war correspondent," Yes! the last fitted him best. He had quite a soldierly look and bearing. Perhaps he reas a soldier, and had been in a dozen fights during the Indian Mutiny. She wished she had noticed him in time to ask Mr. Metcalf who he was. began to think how different his swarthiness was to that of Kharapet; though nearly as dark, his darkness was distinctly European. "I wonder what his eyes are like," thought Stasie lazily. She was beginning to feel bored by sitting there silent and unnoticed.

Even as she thought, the unknown, who had been listening courteously to the fat lady's eager talk, looked round as if a little weary. His eyes met Stasie's, and dwelt upon her with quiet scrutiny—a scrutiny that did not in the least embarrass or disturb her; but his eyes were disappointing, of no particular color, rather deeply set, and decidedly too light for his general com-

plexion.

She looked calmly at the stranger with an odd feeling of fascination, which yet seemed natural and in no way oppressive. This encounter of glances lasted perhaps a second or more—it seemed much longer to

Stasie; then he shook hands with the fat lady and walked away, passing Kharapet, who entered at the same moment, and came straight to where Mrs. Harding stood, still conversing with her friend; then perceiving Stasie, at once took the seat beside her.

"You must forgive my prolonged absence," he said earnestly; "but Her Grace was most kind and condescending, and detained me to discuss a plan for a meeting which she proposes to have at Haverford House—a ladies' meeting Her Grace in the chair. She wishes to raise a fund to supply the Christian women of Syria with straw hats to supersede veils, and copies of two works which seem to form the foundation of female education in England—Mangnall's Questions and The Guide to Knowledge—but—"

Stasie interrupted him with a merry laugh. "What nonsense!" she said. "Do tell me who is the tall

gentleman who passed you as you came in?"

"I did not notice any tall gentleman," returned Kharapet, looking round quickly. "There are several about here."

"Oh! he has gone away now, but he just passed as you came in, and he is rather more like a remarkable

person than any of the others."

"Well, I did not remark him," said Kharapet.
"Tell me, Stasie, do these crowds please you? or would you not, like myself, prefer the happy seclusion of a peaceful home with those you love beyond all that the world can give of grandeur and ambition?" When Kharapet tried to be charming, he was apt to use what

he considered fine language.

Stasie laughed again, and bestowed a mischievous glance upon him. "No matter how much I might love any one," she said, "I should like variety sometimes, and a crowd occasionally! But tell me, are you going to translate Mangnall and The Guide to Knowledge? I assure you they are not worth the trouble! You must tell the Duchess that the march of intellect has left them far behind. And do you believe your coun-

trywomen would wear the straw hats Her Grace wishes

to provide?"

A curious smile glittered in Kharapet's eyes. "We must try to gently guide this somewhat ignorant zeal," he said. Here Mrs. Harding brought her prolonged conversation to a close, and approached them. Kharapet rose and offered her his seat. She looked paler than usual, though her eyes were animated.

"Excuse me for leaving you so long," she said to Stasie, "but I recognized an old friend of my father's—the Dean of Llanmenai—whom I have not seen for years, and we had so much to say to each other. I

fear you have felt neglected, dear.'

"Not at all! I have been amused looking about and conjecturing who a tall gentleman standing near the door might be. Did you see him, Mrs. Harding?"

"No, my back was to the door."

"I must say, however," resumed Stasie, "that I do not see the use of lighting up one's rooms and decorating them with lovely flowers when there is no dancing or music."

"But there will be music," said Mrs. Harding. "Lady Elizabeth told the Dean that a new American contralto was to make her debut here this evening, so let us go into the further drawing-room. I caught a glimpse of a piano there; come, Mr. Kharapet."

They found places with some difficulty, and the best part of the evening now came for Stasie. The American songstress had a glorious voice, and sang with passion and dramatic power. Soon the present ceased to exist, at least for one of her hearers. Other scenes rose up out of the realms of imagination, and unrolled themselves to Stasie's mental vision; all that was sweetest and tenderest in her memory awoke to the magic of the music, almost melting her to tears. But suddenly the spell was broken, the music ceased, and Mrs. Harding was saying, "Stasie, here is Mr. Wyatt."

It was so long since Stasie had seen her guardian, she felt as if making his acquaintance for the first time. He was a man below middle height, but broad and stout, with a lion-like head and thick beard which added to the likeness. His eyes were kindly but somewhat unsteady, and the impressiveness of his words was impaired by a slight occasional hesitation.

"Miss Verner, ah! indeed, to be sure! Lady Elizabeth mentioned you were to be here. Very glad to see you! quite grown up—quite a young lady—a charming young lady, eh, Mrs. Harding? We must be making fresh arrangements for you. Ah! Kharapet, you little thought what a precious charge your worthy

brother committed to our care," he said.

"I am deeply impressed by the sense of my respon-

sibility," returned Kharapet.

"Have you had a—sandwich—or any thing? Allow me," resumed Mr. Wyatt to Mrs. Harding, offering his arm, and leading her towards the wide landing, where light refreshments were laid out. "I have really been so much occupied and overworked," he went on, after he had administered to the wants of his guests, "that I have been quite unable to attend to my fair ward's affairs. It is indeed time something definite were arranged. Will you give my compliments to Mr. Harding, and say I am quite at his service (and Mr. Kharapet's) for any day next week they may choose to appoint, except Wednesday, when I am on committee. I fear, dear Miss Verner, you must think me very negligent of your business, and a——"

"I fear my affairs must be a trouble to you; but please, Mr. Wyatt, do try and arrange for me to leave

school."

"School! yes, certainly, by all means: quite too bad that you should be shut up at school when you ought to be adorning society. Eh, Kharapet? we must see to this. Another glass of claret, Mrs. Harding—no? Kharapet, do look for Lady Elizabeth. I am not sure what our engagements are for the next week or ten

days, but—a—a—you must really give us the pleasure of your company at dinner or luncheon, or—" he paused, fearful of committing himself. "Perhaps," he began again more cheerfully and decidedly, "perhaps you might like an admission into the ladies' gallery of the House of Commons. There is not much going on at present, but next week—"
"Oh, thank you," cried Stasie, her eyes sparkling;

"Oh, thank you," cried Stasie, her eyes sparkling; that will be delightful, will it not, Mrs. Harding? I should so like to hear Gladstone and Disraeli speak."

"Ah! a young politician. But you will excuse me; I see Prince Zneezeouski is going, I must speak to him;" and Mr. Wyatt disappeared just as Kharapet returned with Lady Elizabeth.

"Are you going, Mrs. Harding? it really is not late.

What did Mr. Wyatt want?"

"Something about me, I think," said Stasie, coloring "Ah! well, my dear Miss Verner, I shall send you a little note when I know Mr. Wyatt's wishes, and we must see you sometimes while you are in town. Good night, Mrs. Harding; good-night, Mr. Kharapet. By the way, the dear Duchess thinks of fixing the 30th for her meeting. Remember you must lunch here and come with me. I am afraid Mr. Wyatt will not be able to attend; he has to support some stupid motion about factory children. Good-night."

The conversazione at Lady Wyatt's was on the whole disappointing. Stasie had met with no adventure, and received very little notice. She had in an indistinct way, unacknowledged even to herself, expected both. Kharapet's undisguised admiration had raised her self-estimate to undue proportions, and she had anticipated she knew not what of triumph or success. She dearly loved admiration and amusement, but fortunately for herself was blessed with a certain amount of humor and a healthy readiness to throw aside disagreeables. She therefore told herself she

was a fool to expect special success in a London party, where so many prettier, better dressed, and more highly-bred girls than herself were sure to be assembled. "They are rather different from Miss Boaden's young ladies," she thought, as she dressed herself next morning. "But some of the people were very queer. Hormuz certainly looked handsome. What lovely eyes he has! He seems quite a favorite with all the great people too. I wonder why he has a sort of timidity in his manner. What has he to be afraid of? That tall dark gentleman looked as if he would have talked coolly to an emperor." Then her thoughts strayed to the cruel disappointment of her generous wish to help her friend Mrs. Mathews. She knew that it took all that good woman's care and forethought-a perpetual mental strain-to make both ends meet, and keep a decent appearance in the eyes of the world. Then she had such a thorn in her side (familiar but admirable simile) in Bob. Stasie recalled an ominous shake of Ella's head when that young man was mentioned, for which she had had no time to ask an explanation, and she feared Mrs. Mathews was not quite aware of all the difficulties which lay before her. What a dreadful shame it was that she (Stasie) was not permitted to help her. What if she spoke to Mr. Wyatt? she would not mind doing it a bit; but somehow she could not hope much from him, or imagine him opposing Messieurs Harding and Kharapet. "They are all so smooth and civil, but somehow they don't mind me in the least. I am fed and petted, but utterly disregarded as a rational being, and this is to go on for three years. I don't know how I am to bear it. I begin to think I shall quarrel outright with Mr. Harding if I live in the house with him. I believe I had better stay with Mrs. Mathews, boys or no boys. It would be nice too to be near Ella and Mr. Baldwin. What a kind, good little man he is! I wonder, though, she could ever fall in love with him, yet I believe he is clever and learned." Here her meditations were interrupted by the breakfast bell, and she ran away down-stairs, for unpunctuality was a deadly sin in Mr. Harding's eyes.

In the afternoon of the following day Mrs. Harding went out, as Stasie termed it, "in state," to make several ceremonious visits—that is, she put on her very

best bonnet, and had a smart hired brougham.

"I know I ought to go with you, for you will be bored to death," said Stasie, as they rose from luncheon. "But I do want to call on my aunt or grandaunt, Miss Stretton; she will think me remiss, and I feel drawn towards my only relative. She amuses me too."

"Pray do not mind me," returned Mrs. Harding, smiling. "I am too well accustomed to be bored to shrink from any amount. I will call with you on Miss

Stretton and leave you there."

"Thank you very much," cried Stasie, as she went

up-stairs to make her outdoor toilette.

Miss Stretton's residence was in one of the short streets leading out of Westbourne Grove, which at that period was not absorbed in "Whiteley's" enormous "frontage"—a semi-detached house of good size and appearance, with a rather ragged garden in front, and a rail or two missing from the ornamental fence.

Miss Stretton was at home, and they were shown into a tiny little back parlor, overlooking a garden festooned with clothes hung out to dry, and furnished apparently with old, not elegant, extracts from other

and more favored rooms.

Having caught her foot in a hole in the carpet, and stumbled against a rickety table which she almost capsized, Mrs. Harding effected an entrance, followed by Stasie.

"This is a miserable place for my aunt to live in,"

said the latter.

"It is only a temporary abode, I suppose," returned

"She does not seem sure of her future Mrs. Harding.

plans."

After a few minutes' waiting Miss Stretton, in a rather worn black dress, but with a smart cap, elaborate lace collar, unexceptionable cuffs, and an air of

haste, made her appearance.

"Dear Mrs. Harding-my sweet Stasie-how good of you to come so soon to see a lonely individual like myself! How are the precious pets? and you, Stasie? I need not ask; you are the picture of blooming health."

Having received satisfactory assurances that all was well, Miss Stretton drew forward the least unsteady chair for Mrs. Harding's accommodation, rummaged out a moth eaten hassock for her feet and proceed-

ed---

"I ought to be ashamed to receive you in this poor little parlor after your lovely house, but I know you are too high-minded to despise those whose worldly goods are few and far between; and really I am fortunate in having a landlady who permits me to receive my visitors in her private sitting-room—instead of dragging them up to the top of the house—for as I hope not to be here long, it would be foolish extravagance to indulge in more than one room,"

"Are you going away, aunt?" asked Stasie, who felt an indistinctive wish to keep her new found relative

near her. "I hope not."

"You dear child!" effusively. "I am quite flat-tered, but what can I do? I am obliged to seek employment while yet I am active, and provide for a rainy day!"

"Very sensible indeed; and have you any thing in

view?" asked Mrs. Harding.

"Yes; that is, I have answered an advertisement, which may lead to something. You see," in a severely judicial tone, "the present rage for education puts me at a disadvantage! I only profess to be a fairly well informed gentlewoman. I might conscientiously undertake to prepare my pupils for refined society, but I could not fit them for learned professorships. So I am out of date, like the lighter graces that lent such a charm to life."

And Miss Stretton put her head to one side with a little deprecatory smile, as if she embodied all the graces that could charm drawing-room or salon. She was unmistakably lady-like, but her refinement was limp, as if damp and hard wear had taken the curl out of it.

Stasie looked kindly down upon her from the glorious heights of youth and strength, both untried and unbroken, and thought how terrible it must be to have lived through both, into the dull cloudy autumn time, even beyond the coloring of the changing leaf, almost into the bareness and darkened days of winter, and to be poor and alone, without the material solace, the luxurious lodging, the delicate eating, the rich clothing, the respectful observance, which waits on wealthy age!

"Surely I can be of some use to her," thought Stasie as she beamed a bright kindly smile upon her aunt. "I am sure you look quite young," she said, with the amiable thoughtless flattery of inexperience. must not think of growing old." After a little more conversation, in which Miss Stretton bore the largest share, Mrs. Harding rose, saying she would leave Stasie with her aunt to find her way home herself, a proposi-

tion received with the greatest pleasure.

"You may indeed trust her to me, Mrs. Harding; she will be precious to me as the apple of my eye! I so well remember her poor dear mother on one of the few occasions on which I saw her after her widowhood saying, 'There is none to whom I should so readily trust my sweet little Stasie as to you, Clementina.' We were so near of an age that we dispensed with the formalities of aunt and niece."

When Mrs. Harding had been duly escorted to the garden-gate, and seen off with many hand-kissings and bowings, Miss Stretton returned. "Now, dear, suppose we ascend to my small chamber, en haut." (Miss Stretton liked to use French phrases occasionally). I am in the habit of indulging in a cup of tea at this hour, and I make it myself. You will excuse the homeliness of every thing."

Stasie followed her aunt up three flights of stairs to a front bedroom, where some sticks and a piece of newspaper on the hearth-rug bespoke an attempt to

light the fire.

The apartment was indeed homely, but neat and clean; a patchwork coverlet, a darned carpet, and curtainless windows bespoke the poverty of the land. Still Stasie rather enjoyed the task of assisting to light the fire, and set the table, while Miss Stretton from the depths of a painted chest of drawers drew forth tea, sugar, and buns. The whole thing savored of a surreptitious feast at school, and Aunt Clem (as she requested Stasie to call her) was so kind and so flattering that Stasie grew familiar and more and more attracted to her aunt as the moments flew by. She found herself describing her whole life, confiding her hopes and fears, her likes and dislikes to Miss Stretton, who on her side shed a few tears over the memory of her late niece and the sacrifice she had made for her child's sake; she described Stasie's mother to her in glowing terms, but acknowledged with some reluctance that her daughter did not in the least resemble her. Then she dwelt on the loneliness of her own life, the coldness and ingratitude she had met from so many of those whom she had guided in the way they should go, and led in the paths of propriety and elegance. "And now," she concluded, "I have to go forth again among strangers; it is a hard lot,"

"Perhaps there is something better in store for you," said Stasie, as the idea began to form itself in her mind, that it might be nice to live with Aunt Clem. But, with unusual caution, she kept it to herself. "I must be quite sure what Ella and Mrs. Mathews are

going to do first," she thought.

"I leave myself in the hands of divine Providence," returned Miss Stretton, lifting her eyes to the ceiling and then dropping them again, with a quick side glance to see what effect her words produced.

Stasie was silent, and after a pause her aunt re-

sumed.

"What a very delightful person Mr. Kharapet appears to be! So interesting, so handsome, so gentle!

He seem's quite devoted to you, my dear."

"I am not sure of that," cried Stasie discontentedly; "at any rate he would not oblige me in a very small matter, and I feel very much put out with him and Mr. Harding."

"How so?" asked Aunt Clem.

Whereupon Stasie told of the intended uprooting of the Mathews family, of her own great desire to help them, and of the unfeeling refusal of Messrs. Harding and Kharapet to make any advance—not even a poor

hundred pounds.

"A hundred pounds!" cried Miss Stretton. "My dear, I am not surprised. That is a quantity of money. I don't think they would be justified in advancing you such a sum. The guardian could call them to account—and for that matter so could you. They really must not give you your own money while you are a minor."

"Well, they might have lent me some of their own. I am sure they have plenty," said Stasie, with a

pout.

"My dear, sweet child," cried Miss Stretton, "you expect quite too much. It is out of all reason to suppose that two men of business like Mr. Harding and Mr. Kharapet would give their money with so little hope of return, to say nothing of profit. Ah, Stasie! when you have seen as much of the world as I have you will understand the—the impossibility of such a thing."

"Shall I?" said Stasie. "But they would have lost nothing. I should have paid them; don't I look

honest?"

"Honest! Yes, indeed, and charming too. Still,

you must put such ideas out of your head."

"I suppose so; but it is very annoying not to be able to help those who have been good to me. And I am sorry, too, that Mrs. Mathews is going to leave London and take boarders. I should have liked to live with her—indeed, I still wish to do so part of my time."

"Ahem!" Miss Stretton cleared her throat.
"Whereas, you will, I presume, continue to reside

with that very interesting Mrs. Harding, eh?"

"She is nice, isn't she? But I am not sure that she cares to have me with them; nor am I sure that I

should care to stay."

"You surprise me! I should imagine that it would be just the place for you—a handsome house and a pleasant companion like Mrs. Harding, and "—breaking off suddenly, and then resuming—" What kind of person is Mr. Harding?"

"Oh, he is very nice to me; and he is tall and rather good-looking, and sometimes very bright and amusing, but—I don't think he can stand being contradicted or interfered with, or put out in any way."

"No man can, my dear. They are all alike in that respect. And what would you like best yourself?"

"I hardly know. First, above every thing, I should like to travel. I have seen nothing—nothing all my life but Islington and Forest Hill. Then I should like to come back, and stay a while with Mrs. Mathews, and move about, and all that, till I am twenty-one. By that time I shall really know what I want, and what is best to do."

"By that time, dear child, you will be married," exclaimed Aunt Clem. "With your face and your fortune you will be married—I hope to some distinguished man. Meantime I am sure your ideas are very sensible. How you would enjoy the beauty, the sunshine, the art, the—the general delightfulness of Italy—the gayety of Paris—the music of Dresden!"

"Have you enjoyed all this?" asked Stasie, with

admiration.

"Yes, I have indeed—that is, I have to a certain degree. It has not always been my lot to travel with genial, sympathetic, kindly young creatures like yourself, dear Stasie; but too often in charge of scornful misses, who showed me that my superiority bored them, and my dependence called forth disdain."

"What horrid disagreeable things!" cried Sta-

sie.

"Yes; my position did not permit me to enjoy to the full the pleasures of traveling. My digestion, too, is delicate, and foreign cookery tried it much. Still—and this is strictly between ourselves, my love—should matters be arranged according to your wishes, I should not mind braving the minor discomforts of continental life to be your 'guide, philosopher, and friend,' if I may so express it. I feel sure that in you I would have the kindest, the most interesting companion."

"I don't think I should be disagreeable," said Stasie, reflectively. "And I am sure it is quite a delightful idea—it would be so nice and natural to travel with my own aunt. I will really speak to my guardian

about it. Would it be very expensive?"

"No, not by any means," replied Miss Stretton, quickly. "That is, with an experienced traveler like myself. By the way, who is your guardian, my dear?"

"Mr. Percy Wyatt. He is rather a grandee, and his

wife, Lady Elizabeth, is so funny."

"Very distinguished people indeed, and very enlightened. I am told that Mr. Wyatt is to have a seat in the Cabinet. They are well known in France and Italy, and might be most useful to us. Alas, Stasie! mine is a lonely and somewhat hard life; nor is there much brightness in my future."

"Perhaps there will be more brightness in it than you expect," said Stasie significantly. "I am sure I can feel for you, for I am often very lonely myself, knowing that I belong to nobody and nobody belongs

to me-especially since I knew Ella Mathews was go-

ing to be married."

"Ah, my dear, you are young and charming, and rich. I was not a fright myself; but, dear me, money, money, was always the obstacle; and I am lonely, poor, and growing old."

Miss Stretton pressed her handkerchief to her eyes.
"I am sure you were ever so nice," cried Stasic
sympathetically; "and as we are both alone, let us

stick by each other."

"You dear, warm-hearted girl!" cried Miss Stretton, coming over to kiss her brow. "I feel that a kind, a heavenly Father has sent you to be a comfort and a solace to me!—only, it would be as well not to say that we discussed the question until—until you can prepare those gentlemen who have your affairs in their hands. They might think I put you up to—that I originated the idea, whereas it came from you entirely, my love."

"Of course it did; and I will take care. It is too bad that I cannot have what I want, for I am not un-

reasonable. Still, I think I shall manage."

After this the conversation turned on dress, and Miss Stretton gave her niece many excellent and economical hints. Then it was time for Stasie to return. Her aunt insisted on walking part of the way and putties her into ach.

ting her into a cab.

"I must take care of the only relative left me, and one who, I am sure, well deserves it. Good-by, my dear child. We must try and carry out our little scheme of foreign travel, only pray be cautious, my sweet Stasie—very cautious."

## CHAPTER VII.

It wanted yet an hour to dinner when Stasic reached York Gate, and hearing from the servant that Mrs. Harding had returned, she ran quickly up-stairs to the drawing-room, eager to take counsel with her friend respecting the new and delightful plan which she

had just formed.

On opening the door she saw Mrs. Harding, still in her bonnet and black lace mantle, sitting on a sofa beside a small work-table, on which her arm rested, a brighter and more tender expression than she usually wore lighting up her face, and evidently in deeply-interesting conversation with a gentleman who was reposing in a large easy-chair, his feet stretched far out, and his hat on the carpet beside him—a gentleman whom Stasie immediately recognized as the possible essayist, political economist, or war correspondent who had attracted her attention the evening before. Seeing her hostess thus engaged, she made a movement as if to retire, but Mrs. Harding, perceiving her, exclaimed, "Come here, Stasie; don't run away. My cousin, Dr. Brooke,—Miss Verner."

Stasie came forward with a strange sensation of shy-

ness-of being supremely awkward.

Dr. Brooke rose very deliberately, made Stasie a grand bow, and moved as though he would have brought her a chair, but she hastily placed herself on the sofa beside Mrs. Harding, and began to untie her bonnet almost unconsciously. "Dr. Brooke!"—only a doctor, when she had expected him to be a colonel or a correspondent at least.

"Well, Stasie, have you had a pleasant visit with

your aunt?" asked Mrs. Harding.

"Oh yes! very pleasant; she is so kind. She was telling me of her travels. It must be charming to travel. I wish—" Stasie stopped abruptly, though

brimful of her subject; she remembered it would not

do to broach it before a stranger.

"Were you at Lady Elizabeth Wyatt's reception the night before last?" asked Dr. Brooke, a little abruptly, of Mrs. Harding.

"I was."

"I wonder I did not come across you. I saw Miss

Verner, who was, I suppose, with you?"

"Yes; and I saw you," cried Stasie, with a little nod. She had quite got over her momentary feeling of awkwardness. "Mrs. Harding was beside me, but her

face was turned away."

"Ah! had I seen you I should have recognized you immediately. You are changed, of course, yet still very much the same," remarked Dr. Brooke to Mrs. Harding. But he gave Stasie a quiet, contemplative look, as if she were an object of philosophic interest.

"Yes; it must be nearly twelve years since we met," returned Mrs. Harding, with a pensive smile and a far-

away look in her eyes.

"About twelve! What antiquities we must seem to your young friend?" rejoined Dr. Brooke; "yet it is but a short time to look back upon." His voice struck Stasie as remarkably pleasant,—deep, clear, refined,—what she was disposed to think a "sensible voice," as if the metal that produced those full distinct tones must be of the best quality.

"Short! do you find the time short?" Mrs. Harding was saying; while Stasie thought thus: "I think it is a tremendously long period, a cycle, a century!"

"Well, it has been the most stirring period of your life, the transformation from a school girl to the head"

of a family. Eh, Livy?"

"Yes, a transformation, indeed," returned Mrs. Harding softly, thoughtfully; then rousing herself she exclaimed, "Oh, Stasie, I forgot—there is a letter for you from 'Forest Hill,' I see. It is on the table there by the door."

"From 'Forest Hill'!" cried Stasie, starting up and

walking to the other end of the room to take it. "I wonder what Miss Boaden has to write about?" and she stood there for some minutes, first reading her letter, then evidently reflecting upon it.

"What has become of the Falconers?" asked Dr. Brooke, after a short pause, during which he looked in the same quietly scrutinizing way after Stasie. "They

are distant relations, are they not?"

"They are. Old Mr. Falconer is dead, the boys are in Canada and New Zealand," etc., etc.; and Mrs. Harding plunged into family history for a few minutes till interrupted by Stasie, who came slowly back and stood by the sofa, the letter in her hand, and a suspiciously moist look in her eyes. "Well, and what does Miss Boaden say?" asked Mrs. Harding kindly, seeing

she was waiting to be spoken to.

"She wants to know when I am going back, and wonders I have not written. She thinks I have lost time enough,—so do I, but not for the same reasons! There is nothing to learn at Forest Hill. If I might have some really good masters, some——" breaking off suddenly. "What ought I to say, Mrs. Harding? I don't want to go back. But I must not trouble you now." And Stasie gathered up her gloves and parasol as if going.

"I am quite willing to be troubled, dear. You must tell Miss Boaden that we cannot part with you yet, and

that I will write to her next week myself."

"Oh, thank you, dear Mrs. Harding! I will go and

answer this at once."

"It will be time enough to-morrow." But Stasie, whose perceptions were keen and sensitive, fancied that Mrs. Harding and her cousin would prefer their tête-à-tête unbroken by her presence, said, "I would rather write now," and, with a slight bow to the doctor, left the room.

"Who is the young lady?" asked Dr. Brooke.

Mrs. Harding briefly explained.

"She is a handsome girl," he observed critically;

"not pretty, but fine; her honest, steadfast eyes struck me last night. I observe that you rarely meet, except among Englishwomen, girls who look straight and fearlessly at you, yet without a tinge of consciousness or boldness. She has a splendid physique too."

"What a professional view of the subject!" said

Mrs. Harding, laughing.

"A rational one. What is so admirable as perfect health and full development! Well, Livy, you seem to have changed for the better, from the tumbledown old vicarage to this handsome house

and your present surroundings.'

A faint color rose to Mrs. Harding's cheek as she replied-"No house can ever be more lovely in my eves than that sweet old home; but you are rightthis is a nice house, and I wish the children were in; but I shall see you often while you are in town, I hope.

Do you make any stay?"

"I am quite uncertain-in fact I am uncertain about my plans altogether. I was in London about a month ago, and then I went into Wales to see an old acquaintance who is settled there. Since I came back I have been trying to find you out, for I had no idea where you were; I have scarcely had a correspondent in England."

"No? well, you certainly dropped us all as soon as you went to India," replied Mrs. Harding with an arch

smile.

"Much the wisest thing I could do under my circumstances," said Brooke, returning her smile. "Ah, what jolly days we have had together in old times. By Jove! it brings back another and a different stage of existence to see you again and hear your voice telling of all our former friends." He looked at her kindly, gravely, and very searchingly.

"Yes," she replied calmly, almost coldly, "the present is widely different in all ways from the past. Now tell me of yourself—what you have done, and what are you going to do?"

"On the whole, I have not done badly. You know, though I was not the steadiest of fellows, I could always work when I chose. You remember I was appointed assistant-surgeon to the — Dragoons just as the Regiment was ordered to India. Well, I saw a good deal of service there,—I mean professional service,—for my superior was old and lazy. It was a pleasant life too. I got my share of tiger-shooting and pig-sticking. Then came the Mutiny. I shouldn't like to live through that time again! I was twice hit when looking after the wounded in action-rather badly hit the second time. Then I held a pretty good temporary appointment while matters were being settled; but having had a bad attack of fever, I thought it better to take my leave, and come home. So here I am, not knowing if I shall return to India, or try and make a practice in some English town. I shall look about me for a twelvemonth or so and decide; I really don't much care which way, only I fancy I shall be better in health here."

"I should think so," said Mrs. Harding, "and I hope you will. You would be a friend to—to my children, Jim; for you know I have no near relative—no

man relative I mean."

"I trust you will never need my services," he returned, looking keenly at her, for there was a slight pathetic hesitation in her speech. "Mr. Harding, your husband, is in good health, I hope, and seems to have plenty of this world's goods."

"Oh yes, and is a most affectionate father; still it is always better for a woman to have a big brother of

some kind behind her."

"Perhaps it is," he said thoughtfully, dropping his eyelids till nearly closed; "perhaps it is, and you were always a shocking little coward, Livy, but a sweet little coward too—a sort of little coward that generally finds men ready to work for her, and if needs be die, for her. Eh, Livy?"

Mrs. Harding burst into a laugh—a harsher laugh

than might be expected from so soft and gentle a

woman.

"You must indeed have been living far from the haunts of men' to have preserved such chivalrous ideas, Jim. I never expect any one to work or die for me; but if—if I wanted———" She stopped, and evidently changed her intended speech "sound advice about the children, or—or myself, you would take more interest in us than a stranger."

"Oh, professional advice! I assure you every medical man takes an equally profound interest in his cases,

whether they are personal friends or not."

"I cannot believe that," said Mrs. Harding candidly.

"You may, I assure you. By the way, are you sure you do not want advice now? You have not developed as I always expected you would."

"How ought I to have developed?"

"Into decided *embonpoint*—into a sleek rolypoly little woman, with very bright eyes and a beautiful complexion, a little lazy and very merry. Now you are thin and pale—too thin and pale. How is that?"

"How can I tell?" said Mrs. Harding, laughing good-humoredly. "But I am very glad I have developed my own way, not yours. I suspect I am all

the better for not being a rolypoly!"

"I hope so," said the doctor gravely. "You have had no doubt some of the trials almost inseparable from motherhood. Have you lost any children?"

"Yes, one—a sweet little girl! my second child. It was a cruel blow." Her soft eyes were suffused with

tears.

"No doubt; but these babies cannot make a place in your life. It is a wound that heals quickly."

Mrs. Harding shook her head.

"I should like to see your babies," continued Dr. Brooke. "I shall come again soon, but will bid you good-by now. It must be nearly your dinner hour!"

Mrs. Harding flushed slightly; she would have liked to have kept him to dinner, but was not sufficiently mistress in her own house to take such a liberty. "You will leave your address, Jim? Mr. Harding would like to call. He will be very pleased to make your

acquaintance."

"I feel quite anxious to make his, I assure you," he returned, taking out his card-case to place a card on the table. "What are you going to do with your handsome young friend? not to send her back to school? That would be cruel and absurd."

"I should like to keep her with me. She is a charm-

ing companion, but her fate is not in my hands!"

"She looks like a girl that would prefer directing it herself. Well, good-morning, Livy! I suppose it must be Mrs. Harding before the general public?"

"I suppose so-good-by, Jim!"

When Mrs. Harding was alone she took up Dr. Brooke's card and stood for several minutes gazing on it—but gazing with dry eyes and a quiet set face—a face from which hope seemed to have gone—utterly and for ever—so still and cold did it look. She was roused by the door opening to admit the children, fresh and rosy from their afternoon walk. Her countenance cleared, her lips relaxed, and, sitting down, she took little Willie on her knee and began to ask him about the boat he had been sailing.

Stasie, in the retirement of her own chamber, lost no time in answering Miss Boaden's letter. She did this with mixed feelings. She thought from Mrs Harding's manner that she was not again to be imprisoned within the respectable walls of Elmwood House, and she rejoiced at her prospective freedom. Nevertheless, she felt an unexpected tender regret at the idea of bidding a final farewell even to her enemy Miss Amelia. Still more deeply did she feel that she was drifting away from her old friend Mrs. Mathews and her family in spite of herself. "Yet I can go and see them if I like," she mused; "and by and by, when every thing is

settled, for they must arrange for me to live somewhere, and give me some money for clothes and things" ("they" meant Harding and Kharapet), "I shall be able to pay Ella a visit, and make her a present now and then! How nice it would be to travel with Aunt Clem! to learn to sing and to speak German, and see all the delightful places she has seen. I suppose that Dr. Brooke has traveled a great deal, but there is no knowing. I thought he must be somebody very distinguished, and he is only a doctor, after all."

Her letter finished, Stasie, who was violently tidy by fits and starts, applied herself to arrange her drawers, and put fresh lace in the sleeves and collar of a dress, speculating meanwhile if she should ever rise to the

dignity of having a maid of her own.

Mr. Harding was a little late for dinner—and somewhat silent thereat—and the repast was nearly over before Stasie, who was generally the principal talker, made up her mind how to open the subject of her return to school.

"I had a letter from Miss Boaden to-day, Mr. Harding. She wants me to go back," she said at length.
"She does, does she? and I suppose you are very

anxious to go-eh Stasie?"

"You know about that? Mrs. Harding said I might

write that I should not return just yet."

"Hum! so she is not tired of you! Well, Stasie, curiously enough, I have been writing to Miss Boaden myself to-day.

"What about, dear Mr. Harding?"

"Only to tell her that you will not return to school after the holidays; and as they are only three weeks off, you may as well stay where you are—so you can go to Forest Hill and pack up your belongings as soon as you like!"

"Oh, thank you, that is delightful! And you will let me live with you—that is to say, when I am in England."

"When you are in England! pray where are you going to?"

"I am sure I don't know; only I am not going to stay in London all my life!"

"God knows what an enterprising young lady of your sort may do! At any rate you are welcome to stay here till you have a house of your own!"

"You are very good and kind," said Stasie warmly. "I should like a house of my own by and by when things are settled, but above all I want to travel."

"Well, you must just wait a bit," said Mr. Harding a little impatiently; and his wife, with the watchful tact born of much experience in the art of management, rose and led the way to the drawing-room.

"Be satisfied with one step at a time, Stasie," she said, as she opened her work-basket. "You may lose

more than you gain by asking for too much."

"It is rather hard to be obliged to beg for what one has a right to," cried Stasie indignantly, throwing herself into a large easy-chair. "Why should I not go abroad? there is nothing unreasonable in the wish."

"Certainly not. And I dare say later you will be able to carry it out; but for the present would it not be wiser to wait patiently for the consent of those who are, I am sure, doing their best? Believe me, we are neither better nor happier for having every thing our own way, especially at your age."

"Perhaps so. But it is very disagreeable to be contradicted," replied Stasie, adding after a pause. am sure, dear Mrs. Harding, I am always very happy with you, and—and would it bore you if I had music

lessons? I cannot be quite idle!"

"It would not bore me in the least! You are quite right, Stasie; there is nothing so dull as idleness."

"And let me teach dear little Ethel and Willie to

read!"

"That you are most heartily welcome to try," said Mrs. Harding, laughing; "you will not like the task long."

"I assure you I can be persevering! There, there is the front-door bell. I dare say it is Hormuz Kharapet." "Ah! I do not think he would come in the evening when he had not been invited to dinner, unless, indeed, he has business with Mr. Harding."

"Why don't you like Hormuz? he is so nice and

gentle."

"Why do you suppose I do not like him?"

"I cannot explain why, but I am quite sure you do not." Mrs. Harding laughed, and Stasie changed the subject by consulting her friend as to what day would be best to fetch away her things from Elmwood House. This interesting discussion was interrupted by the entrance of Mr. Harding, followed by Kharapet. Mr. Harding was looking brighter than he had done at dinner. Kharapet, having greeted Mrs. Harding, drew a chair beside Stasie. "I have not seen you since Lady Elizabeth's party," he said, slowly, while his glittering eyes, half veiled by their long lashes, dwelt on her intensely, hungrily; but Stasie was so much occupied with the intricacies of a lace cravatte she was making for Mrs. Mathews, that she did not heed them, and he gazed to his heart's content.

"No? How fast time goes in London!" returned Stasie, a little irrelevantly. "Do you know I am not to go back to school, Hormuz?" looking suddenly in his face—an odd feeling, partly surprise, partly nervousness, making her laugh as she met his eyes. "Are

you astonished?"

"I am not, considering that I was the chief cause of the change you so much desired. I was determined, whatever the obstacles, that you should not be sent

back to the imprisonment you hate."

While Kharapet was whispering assurances that Stasie's wishes were his law, Mrs. Harding was saying, "I had a visit from Dr. Brooke to-day. You remem-

ber hearing us speak of my cousin Jim?"

"Ay," taking up the card his wife held out, "I remember. I fancy he must be the Dr. Brooke old Pearson, our chairman, was speaking of yesterday. He has just come back from India, hasn't he?"

"He has."

"I'll call on him, and have him to dinner. I dare

say he could give me a wrinkle about-"

What, did not appear, for Stasie broke in, "I am sure that Dr. Brooke must have traveled a great deal. He looks like it. He is the man I asked you about, Hormuz,—at Lady Elizabeth Wyatt's, I mean; you had not observed him. Don't you remember?"

Hormuz did remember; and his face grew serious

as he asked, "Who? who is this gentleman?"

"A cousin of my wife's! You must come and meet him, Kharapet."

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Stasie's next visit to her good friend Mrs. Mathews was rather painful in more ways than one. First, it was a farewell. The old house was dismantled; the rusty untidy little den where she had often stolen away from her work or lessons to devour novels, poetry, plays, any thing she could lay her hands upon, was absolutely empty, as most of the heavy luggage had already been dispatched, and the family were crowded into two or three rooms. Secondly, Mrs. Mathews was not so cordial as formerly; she remarked that no doubt it was an effort for Stasie to come all that way from the grand house she was staying in now to their humble abode, or she might have come oftener to see them, though, perhaps, she (Mrs. Mathews) ought to be thankful that she came at all, etc., etc., stings which soon roused Stasie to indignant remonstrance, and finally to a torrent of tears, when Ella interposed, standing up manfully for her friend.

"You don't know how hampered and worried I am," sobbed Stasie; "I cannot do as I like! Besides, it would not be civil to walk out of the house when I chose, without caring whether Mrs. Harding wanted me or not. But if you think I would rather be sitting in her grand drawing-room, doing crochet or woolwork, instead of helping you to pack with my gown

tucked up, you are very much mistaken! I wish you would not be so unkind, Mrs. Mathews! When I am more my own mistress you will see I do not forget all

your goodness to me."

"Well, well, Stasie, I never thought you a heartless child! but law! my dear, the world soon changes the best of us! There, dry your eyes, and have a cup of tea. I would much rather believe you to be kind and true than a weather-cock."

"That she is not, I am sure," cried Ella heartily. "Do not mind mother, Stasie! she is tired and worried. We are very anxious about Bob! There is nothing for him to do in C—, so he will be sure to get into mischief, and he ought to go on working for his diploma. Fortunately, our old friends Mr. and Mrs. Deacon, have offered to take him in till he can look about him; still it will be money out of mother's pocket, and I know he is in debt—not much, I dare say, but always more than we can afford. If it were not for Bob I declare we should be too happy!"

"Well, well, Bob will come right yet," said the fond mother. "I can see the poor lad is dreadfully down

at the idea of parting with us."

Stasie opened her eyes at this, but wisely held her tongue. A friendly cup of tea succeeded, in which all bitterness seemed to be drowned, and the future was

fully discussed.

Ella was not to be married for a month or two, as she wished to assist her mother in settling in her home, so as to be quite prepared for the October term, for which date they had already secured one boarder, and

had the promise of another.

"It will make me quite independent and comfortable if I can get four or five," said Mrs. Mathews. "Janet is getting now to be a great help, and, I will say, is a steady, industrious girl, so she can do most of the housekeeping, but no one will ever be to me what Ella is," etc., etc., etc.

Peace and good understanding being thoroughly

restored, Stasie parted with her old and valued friends not dry-eyed. After many hearty hugs and kisses, promises to write, and assurances of constancy, she was carefully put into a cab by Mrs. Mathews herself, who demanded the driver's ticket, and gave him the address, with many injunctions to take special care of the young lady.

## CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN Stasie returned to Mrs. Harding's, bringing with her all her worldly goods, and having bade a final adieu to school life, she experienced but little of the exultant joy with which she was wont to anticipate that event.

She was rather vexed with herself for feeling pleased. She accused herself of being hard and ungrateful to the Misses Boaden. After all, their lives were far from easy: their task was no child's play, and had they not done their best for her? Had she done her

best for them?

There is in young creatures of the higher type an exalted idea of what life ought to be, of which their elders, from whose hearts the rude contact of the work-a-day world has brushed these fair and delicate impressions, have seldom any notion. A supreme sense of duty at all costs—of self-devotion at any sacrifice—of conduct pure, graceful, self-restrained, which only needs consistency and the power of resistance to make youth more dignified than age. These two essential ingredients are, however, what youth generally lacks. Would youth be youth had it the force to act up to its own ideal? And so the sweetest, kindest girls often walk unevenly among the snares and pitfalls of their onward path, with here a vista of pleasure too tempting to be resisted, and there a stum-

bling-stone of irritation too big and rugged to be surmounted, while consciousness of the weak places thus probed, the vulnerable points thus discovered, galls and humiliates—not always strengthening the spirit against the next encounter, save in those rare instances where power is equal to aspiration.

Few who have not been admitted into the full confidence of higher-toned girlish hearts can imagine how little pleasure, as mere pleasure, enters into their

scheme of life.

With all her vitality, her sense of enjoyment, her little surface vanity, Stasie's was a nature of this order. This necessity to be in sympathy with and useful to her fellows gave poignancy to her regret at her own isolation. She owed no particular duty to any one.

She had nothing to do but to please herself.

If she had a grumpy grandfather, a sickly sister, an exacting father or mother, it would be more satisfactory. As it was, the best thing perhaps she could do was to adopt Aunt Clem. She was the only person to whom she could possibly be necessary, and, though a dear good soul, would probably want bearing with and humoring occasionally. To Mrs. Mathews Stasie felt she could never be so essential. Mrs. Mathews had her ow: large family to struggle for and with, to love and to be loved by: a little money help kindly and delicately administered was all she needed. But Aunt Clem was like herself, utterly alone. She was also growing old and very poor. Aunt Clem therefore, for the present, must be Stasie's object.

Thus reflecting, Stasie dressed for dinner. She was pleased at the idea of meeting Dr. Brooke, who was expected, though he was only a doctor. She hoped she would have an opportunity of talking to him. She wanted to put many questions to him, and was determined not to lose her chance. Stasie was not shy, but she had too much natural taste and tact to be in the

least forward.

Having attired herself carefully in one of her pretty

new dresses of soft French gray and white lace, and braided her light-brown hair into broad plaits behind her little ears, looping them up to the coil at the back

of her head, she went down-stairs.

The drawing-room was only occupied by the children. Johnnie was in a rocking-chair, which was a source of great delight; Willie and Ethel stood at a little distance watching him rock to and fro with some violence.

"Stasie, he has been rocking himself ever so long, and he won't give me a turn," cried Ethel, running to

meet her.

"No, I haven't," said Johnnie, "and I am not going

to give up to a bit of a girl like you."

"You are a rude selfish boy," remarked Stasie. Passing him she took up an illustrated book, and knowing it would create an ill-timed disturbance if she tried to evict the tenant of the chair, she called the two little ones to her.

"Come and sit by me on the sofa, and I will tell

you stories about these pictures."

"We have seen all those," said Ethel discontentedly.

"Well, bring me another book, Willie." "We have seen them all," remarked Ethel.

"Never mind. Stasie, tell us about the other sides

of the pictures."

"Yes, I will, you dear little man," cried Stasie, delighted with the child's quaint speech, and taking the book he brought, she established herself on a large sofa at the end of the room, a small hearer at each side. Ethel knelt, resting an arm on Stasie's shoulder, and gazing on the page below. Willie sat beside her upon one leg, the other hanging down, his elbow on Stasie's lap, his eyes fixed on her face, absorbed in the fairyland of wicked giants and lovely injured fairy godmothers' children which she proceeded to open up to him. It was a pleasant picture, as the door opened and Dr. Brooke was announced. He advanced, grave, cool, a smile in his eyes. Stasie put aside her incumbrances and rose to meet him. "Mrs. Harding will be here directly," she said, not quite sure if she ought or ought not to give him her hand. He decided for her by making a rather formal bow.

"I fancy I am too early," he returned; "but I wanted to make my small cousins' acquaintance, and

feared they might not be visible after dinner."
"I will present them," said Stasie. "Come here, Johnnie,"-to the "rebel of the family," who had ceased to rock, and sat looking at the new-comer with curiosity not untinged with awe,—"This is Master John Harding, the eldest son, and here is Willie, the youngest; this young lady is Miss Ethel Harding, who comes between them.

Dr. Brooke shook hands with Johnnie, then placing his hand on the child's head put it back, and looked earnestly in his face. "Glad to see you, my boy. No trace of the mother or her people here! Ah! Willie, you are of a different brand! You are not too old to be kissed. And Miss Harding! come here! You have your mother's eyes. I congratulate you." He kissed the two younger ones kindly, and took Ethel on his knee. Willie retreated to Stasie, and Johnnie stood looking distrustfully at the stranger.

"I can remember Mrs. Harding about the age of this child," said Dr. Brooke to Stasie, "a most delicate

little lady."

"Papa says I am more like my Aunt Mills," said Ethel with a pout.

"So much the worse for you," he returned. "Who

is Aunt Mills?" to Stasie.

"A sister of Mr. Harding's, I think."

"And you, my little man," stretching out his hand to Willie. "So you make Miss-Miss-" he paused-

"Verner," supplied Stasie, noting in her own mind that he had forgotten her name-

"Thank you!—Miss Verner tell you stories. Are

you not a lucky little fellow?"

"Yes! Such pretty stories, all about fairies in the

woods, and sometimes poor peasants and giants and even ogres."

"I don't care for them; they are all nonsense," said

John, who was in a contradictory mood.

"What a wiseacre!" replied Dr. Brooke. "Why, if they do not take care, you will set the Thames on fire. Do you like the stories, Miss Curly Locks?"

"Oh yes! And Stasie dresses my doll. Stasie can

cut out paper boats and crosses and-"

"What a clever young lady!"—a laughing glance at her. "Do you think she would tell us a story while we are waiting for mother?—Is it mother or mamma?"

"Mamma, I am sorry to say," replied Stasie.

"Yes, 'mother' is better. But will not Miss Verner tell us a story?"

"Do, do, do, Stasie, dear!"

"No. Dr. Brooke has been in Fairyland himself; he ought to know beautiful stories,—real ones,—not merely made up, like mine."

"I have no genius for story-telling; I am too matter-of-fact."

"Don't say that," cried Stasie impulsively. "You do not look like it. I hate matter-of fact people!"

"Indeed!" very gravely. "Then I retract the

statement."

Stasie laughed merrily. "I am glad you do." "You have been away in India," observed Johnnie, who was contemplating his new acquaintance with profound attention; "and papa says you ought to have made heaps of money there. Have you?"

"I deeply regret to say I have not."

"Why not?" persisted Johnnie.

"Go and tell mamma that Dr. Brooke is here," said Stasie, blushing at the boy's rude speech, yet unable to

subdue a smile at the characteristic inquiry.

The doctor laughed mockingly. "By all means send off the young gentleman, lest his inquiries should display my weakness too plainly."

"I don't want to go," said Johnnie, and stepped out upon the balcony.

" Won't you tell us a story?" persisted Willie, slip-

ping his hand into Dr. Brooke's.

"Mine would be too grim for a little man like you," he returned. "Miss Verner's fancies must be much pleasanter. You, too, have been in the East, Mrs. Harding tells me," addressing her.

"So long ago that I cannot remember it; but I should like to go there again. Indeed I long to travel

any where."

The doctor smiled upon her an indulgent smile— "As if I were an infant like Ethel," she thought indignantly; and then their conversation was interrupted

by the entrance of Mrs. Harding.

Stasie remarked that she greeted her guest with unusual cordiality, and that he, too, was more animated in his manner than when speaking to the children. In a few minutes they were joined by Mr. Harding, who was loud and profuse in his apologies for being a little late, and seemed anxious to impress on his wife's relative that he was particularly glad to see him. It had never before occurred to Stasie's inexperience that her friend and ally, Mr. Harding, was common or underbred; but contrasting the repose, the ease of Dr. Brooke's manner, with the kind of rough cordiality assumed by her host, she felt his inferiority, and this added a shade or two more to the half-unconscious distrust which was gradually deepening in her mind towards him.

Mr. Williams, a gentleman who had more than once dined at York Gate during Stasie's sojourn, and the inevitable Kharapet having joined them, they went down to dinner.

The conversation was unusually animated, as the new guest's opinions were different on most matters from those of his convives. Nor did he hesitate to show this difference distinctly, though civilly. His way of expressing himself, too, though plain and

straightforward, bore the stamp of thought and culture, and Stasie was well content to listen, disregarding the whispers of Kharapet, who sat beside her. He spoke little to any one else, but at times listened to what was going on with very close attention. When the repast was over, and the servants had left the room, something was said about Giulini in the *Trovatore*, upon which Stasie exclaimed how much she should like to hear an opera.

"It is not easy for us to go," returned Mrs. Harding. "Neither Mr. Harding nor Mr. Kharapet like to face the discomforts of a theater; and I think Stasie and I require an escort to such a crowded place as the

Italian Opera."

"Why do you not make use of me?" asked Dr. Brooke. "I am an idle man at present, and though I should prefer a play, I have no objection to an opera."

"That would be delightful," cried Stasie. "Do-

do fix a day, dear Mrs. Harding."

"Tell me what days you are disengaged," said Dr.

Brooke, "and leave the affair in my hands."

"But you wrong me," exclaimed Kharapet eagerly.
"I should always be ready to go with you where I could be of use, though I do not pretend to enjoy these exhibitions!"

"Then it is better to have some one who does, for it is not pleasant to know you are inflicting a punish-

ment," said Stasie gayly.

"No service I could render to you would be a punishment to me," returned Kharapet. "But I confess I neither enjoy nor approve these musical and dancing entertainments. I am of my noble and good friend Lord Saintsbury's opinion, that it is derogatory to the charming young ladies of England to witness such things. In the East we take better care of our ladies."

"Do you never admit Nautch girls into your houses in Syria?" asked Dr. Brooke. "I had some friends with Outram's expedition who gave me curious ac-

counts of the Nautch dances at Baghdad."

"They are never permitted in the houses of Syrian

Christians," said Kharapet with some emphasis.

"Oh, indeed!" said Brooke. "I beg your pardon. Well, Mrs. Harding, when shall we go to this shocking exhibition?"

'Any day you like next week. To-morrow will be Saturday, and of course there is no chance of getting

places."

"I hope you will see that my dinner and all that is red for," said Mr. Harding. "I need not be uncomcared for," said Mr. Harding. fortable as well as deserted."

"You should dine at your club," returned Brooke. "I am so domesticated I do not belong to one," re-

joined Harding.

"A great mistake! Mrs. Harding, you ought to have him put up at the 'Reform;' every man ought

to join a club."

"You ought to join mine, the 'West Central.' It is a capital club, meet every body, great opportunities for discussing business matters, and an excellent cook," said Mr. Williams.

"Well, I'll see about it," returned Harding, as his

wife rose to leave the room followed by Stasie.

"Come up here, doctor," said the host, making a place by him after the ladies left, "and try a glass of this port. It's not bad; in fact, it's a sin to throw it away on women."

"They seldom avail themselves of their chances in that way," said Brooke, moving into the place offered him. "It is rather a feminine failing to be indifferent

to the joys of the palate."

"I am not so sure!" replied Williams. "Some of them are a little too fond of alcohol, if we are to believe all we hear."

"A small minority, I imagine."

"Fill your glass, Williams," cried the host; "don't mind Kharapet. It's his misfortune more than his fault that he can't drink a decent glass of wine."

"You are to be congratulated," remarked the doctor gravely, "on having a necessity the less—nevertheless—it is well to be able to enjoy a first-rate vintage, such

as this, Mr. Harding."

"Right you are, doctor," he returned heartily. Mr. Harding was rarely seen to greater advantage than when entertaining his male guests—pride in the excellence of his wine—both as a delicacy and a representative of money's worth, pleasure in the gustation, backed by the presence and encouragement of others, and supported under the extra expenditure by a subtile imaginative hope that in some indirect way the outlay would bring forth profit, either in extending his connection or securing similar enjoyment at the cost of others, warmed him into hospitality. At present, for some reason, he was anxious to be civil to, and make a good impression on his wife's cousin.

'And so, doctor, I hear you are nearly tired of

grilling under an Eastern sun."

"Not exactly. In some respects I like India, but I begin to think I might do better at home; the career

of a military surgeon is limited."

"No doubt," said Mr. Williams. "If you could get a start in a new neighborhood, it would be the making of you." Dr. Brooke looked at him, but made no immediate reply; the familiarity of the remark did not please him.

"As I do not drink wine, may I be allowed to join

the ladies?" asked Kharapet, rising.

"To be sure," said Harding, laughing. "You are not much good away from them—one of them at any rate." An indescribable smile, self-satisfied, sensual, over-spread the Syrian's face as he left the room—an expression that made Brooke feel a strong desire to quench him with a sudden douche of cold water from the glass jug which was temptingly near. "Well, well, we all have our mad fits, as I dare say you both know," continued Mr. Harding apologetically; "but to return, as you are looking about you, doctor, Mr. Williams will

tell you about a locality which is worth your notice-

a very rising place indeed."

"Yes; as a connection of my worthy friend Harding here, I don't mind putting you up to a good thing, either as a residence or an investment. Two or three years ago a few sound City men observed a property in Surrey, in a capital situation, half an hour from Waterloo Station, unoccupied and in the market. They thought it a promising spot for villas, and they formed themselves into a 'Landed Estate Company,' bought up the property, advanced money to tenants who wished to build, made roads and drains, put up fences, and divided it into plots. So far we have been very successful. (I am solicitor to the Company.) We have a splendid site for a church, where there is a temporary iron erection, and many of the houses are let to most respectable people. All we want is a resident doctor of high standing, and then having provided for the religious and bodily health of our tenantry we shall do well. If you, my dear sir, will make a small investment—say a couple of thousand pounds—you can be your own landlord in a sense, or erect a mansion for yourself! I omitted to mention that there is an affiliated company linked with ours-The Sefton Park Building Company, Limited. The Company builds houses of a first-rate order at wonderfully low terms, shares ruling at seventy-five, and rising rapidly. I will send you a prospectus. Mr. Harding is one of our directors, and has purchased a good deal of land, knowing its value, like a shrewd man of business as he is."

"Thank you," returned the doctor, helping himself to some olives; "I don't fancy such a neighborhood would afford much of a practice. Still, let me have the prospectus."

"I think you know our chairman," said Mr. Harding—"Sir Frederic Pearson, an old Indian."

I have met him, poor old fellow! Does he still dabble in shares? He has been bitten too."

"Ah, well! he is all right with us."

" No doubt."

Mr. Williams now turned the conversation by asking some questions about Indian matters, and having answered him, Brooke in his turn inquired as to Kharapet's nationality.

"He is not a Mahometan, I see," he added.

"No; he is a Syrian Christian—a Nestorian, or some such thing. His brother was our Consul at Mardīn. A money-making old buffer; scraped a decent lot together, and left it all to that good-looking girl up-stairs. Our friend Kharapet is co-executor with myself, and inclined to go in for the property and the

proprietress."

Dr. Brooke made no reply, but a look of disgust crept over his dark grave face; and Mr. Harding went on, "Kharapet is not a bad fellow, and a deuced sharp one! He makes his way wonderfully with my Lord Saintsbury and Exeter Hall. A pious duchess pets him, and a couple of countesses coddle him. In short, if my pretty friend makes up her mind to give him herself and her money, she may float into swell society." "I fancy she would pay a high price for it," returned

the doctor carelessly.

"Ah! you Indian officers are a little too hard on natives. Kharapet is a handsome fellow; Lord bless you! a man is a man to most women, no matter what his color or creed. And Kharapet is a bond fide Christian." Then, à propos of this profound remark, Mr. Harding proceeded with much chuckling and enjoyment to relate one or two "good stories," not too delicate in their details, which Mr. Williams loudly applauded, while Dr. Brooke laughed a little contemptuously, the conversation which ensued being neither interesting nor edifying. Dr. Brooke rose and said he would join the ladies; on his departure Mr. Harding and his man of business immediately plunged into serious and absorbing conversation.

Brooke walked slowly up-stairs, an undefined sensa-

tion of uneasiness and disgust crisping the current of his thoughts. He was himself above the average in ability, and endowed with all the qualities that fit a man for the profession he had adopted: closely observant, with nerves of steel, logical in thought, and possessed of an imagination sufficiently vivid to be the pioneer of discovery. Though no saint, he was a man of clean and active life. He had had a boyish fancy for his pretty cousin, which absence and occupation had so far obliterated that it pleased him to know she was well married. He was half amused at the tender gladness his meeting with her evoked. He did not think there was so much sentiment left in his practical nature. The first sight of her face suggested doubt as to the happiness of her prosperity, and now his interest in her was rapidly deepening as he reflected on the horror of being indissolubly linked to such a man as her husband. "Does she feel it? Women are so mercifully endowed with the power of self-deception, a compensation for the blindness in which they grope about the world! How can any girl know the man she is going to marry? Not if she had been on speaking terms with him for years. Livy ought to have had a gentleman and a good fellow. This man is neither. I wish it had been possible to have kept her for myself, but of course the everlasting contradiction of things forbade that."

So thinking, Dr. Brooke opened the drawing-room door, and saw the object of his thoughts sitting at a small table pouring out tea. Kharapet was close beside her, speaking with earnestness in a low tone, and the new-comer fancied he read weariness and dis-

like in her cold, composed aspect.

At a little distance, comfortably ensconced in the corner of a sofa near the lamp, Stasie was reading so attentively that she did not look up when the door opened. Unconsciously piqued by this inattention, Dr. Brooke, after receiving a cup of tea from his hostess, walked over to where she sat, and with a civil

"May I venture to interrupt you?" took a place beside her.

"What is your study, Miss Verner?"

"Such a delightful book—quite different from any thing I ever read before—Ruskin's Seven Lamps of Architecture—do you know it?"

"I can't say I do. I have seen reviews of it, but that is all: works of imagination are not much in my

line."

"But this is not a work of imagination," said Stasie, laying it open on her lap. "It is all about churches and cathedrals, and windows and columns—real, solid

things."

"Still I think, unless I have formed a very false idea of the work, it is highly imaginative," he returned, with a smile at her earnestness and the slight hesitation that showed she was unaccustomed to put her graver thoughts into words. "Mr. Ruskin finds all sorts of meanings and intentions and laws in these fine old buildings and their decorations, which I am quite sure the builders were incapable not only of expressing but of conceiving.

"I do not like to hear you say so," said Stasie, slowly and thoughtfully. "I cannot tell why, but I feel you are wrong. Perhaps these old builders, without knowing or intending, just worked their hearts and minds into the stones they were cutting or fastening

together."

"Very good, Miss Verner. I see you are quite competent to understand and appreciate Ruskin."

"If you knew the delight he has given me, I think

you would leave him alone."

"I will; he is sacred to me now," returned Brooke, laughing gently, and looking down into the soft, dark, pleading eyes so seriously raised to his, with no small surprise that a mere school-girl should put so much heart into such a subject. "Nay, more, I will concede that there is always some character, some individuality in the work of men's hands, so that the work

of a Persian, a Hindoo, or a Chinaman, must differ widely."

"Well, that is just what Ruskin says."

"He goes much further, I believe."

"Do read the book; I am sure you will be delighted with it, Dr. Brooke."

"Very well, I will read it."

A pause. Then Stasie began, with some timidity, "Did you ever hear any thing about the Rosicrucians when you were in India?"

"The Rosicrucians? What do you know about

them?" asked Brooke, with increasing surprise.

"Oh, next to nothing-only what I have read in Bulwer's Zanoni."

"Do they allow Bulwer at your school, or is he a

school classic?"

"Ah, no. I read some of his novels before I went

to school. Are they not delightful?"
"Before you went to school! You must be very precocious! No. I am not very fond of Bulwer. He is too stilted and unreal."

Stasie raised her eyebrows with a look of mock despair, and persisted in her inquiry. "But did you ever hear any thing about the Rosicrucians in India?"

"Nothing whatever. I cannot say I felt any inter-

est in the subject."

"But there was such a sect or order?"

"No doubt-something of the nature of Free-

masons or---"

"Will you not charm us with some of your sweet music, Stasie?" interrupted Hormuz, coming softly up to where she sat. "I have not enjoyed it for more than a week."

"My music is not worth listening to, you must know it is not; and Dr. Brooke is just going to tell me some things I want to know," returned Stasie, with great candor and some impatience.

"I should much prefer listening to your voice than to my own, especially as I can give little or no information on the profound subjects which interest

you."

Stasie colored vividly for a moment as the idea that he was laughing at her presented itself. "If I thought my music could give you any pleasure I would play or give at a reach but I are a reach herizon."

sing at once; but I am a mere beginner-"

"To me it is divinely sweet," said Kharapet in a low voice. As he spoke the door opened to admit Mr. Harding and his remaining guest. "If you go and play now, Stasie," said Mrs. Harding from the tea-table, "you will help conversation, and no one will listen to you."

"Very well," returned Stasie good-humoredly, rising

and moving towards the piano.

"What a curious incentive!" said Dr. Brooke, looking after her. Hormuz followed, but did not attempt to open the piano or help her to find her music. He stood leaning on the instrument, gazing at the musician, who went quietly through her simple pieces very contentedly, while she observed that Mr. Harding and Mr. Williams continued some discussion begun before, coffee cups in hand, and Dr. Brooke went over to Mrs. Harding and soon seemed absorbed in talk with her.

"What were you speaking of to this stranger?" asked Kharapet at length, coming closer to Stasie. He looked less mild and smiling than usual.

"Oh, books and things you don't care about."

"I am not unlearned, Stasie. Do you know that I am consulted by some of your greatest men respecting Assyrian antiquities?"

"Oh, very likely! But do not talk to me while I am

playing-it puts me out."

Hormuz's countenance darkened into a very ugly expression as he stood contemplating what was to his Eastern mind a problem not easy to solve—a woman, a mere girl, with an independent existence, who could tell him to be silent when he wished to talk—who was often quite unconscious of his gaze—and to whom,

however incredible it might seem, he felt he could not communicate the flame that consumed himself. After all, the slumber of her unawakened womanhood might account for this extraordinary indifference—northern women were slow to develop. If once he spoke to her, and poured out his love in the burning phrases he felt thronging to his lips, surely she would melt and tremble, and yield to his ardent affection.

"Was I very rude, Hormuz?" said Stasie, coming to the end of her piece and noting his downcast looks.

"But I cannot play and talk."

She smiled sweetly, archly, as she spoke, and before he could answer Mr. Harding called out, "Give us a song, Stasie."

She complied at once, singing a Scotch ballad which

she knew by ear.

Dr. Brooke came across to the piano when she ceased. "You really have a sweet, sympathetic voice," he said; "much might be made of it."

"I am glad you think so. I am going to have

lessons."

"Good-night, Miss Verner. I will not forget the opera."

"I like your cousin Dr. Brooke so much," said Stasie to Mrs. Harding, as that lady turned into her young guest's room on her way to pay a last visit to the nursery before retiring for the night. "I am afraid he is satirical, but I am sure he is very clever."

"He is a man of ability, and used to be very nice and kind, but the world changes men greatly," re-

turned Mrs. Harding with a sigh.

"At any rate he will take us to the opera, and that will be delightful. Mr. Harding does not mind, does he?"

"He would certainly have said so if he did," said

his wife quietly.

Dr. Brooke, walking back through the dim, quiet

streets to his hotel, reflected on the drama opening up to him in the glimpses he had caught of under-currents eddying round his former sweetheart. "Poor little Livy! I am afraid she is mated to a brute, and not even a straightforward brute! I don't fancy the legal adviser, either; and as to the Exeter Hall pet, I'd like to kick him when I see the fellow gloating over that nice, bright girl as if she were his particular property. They will never let her degrade herself by marrying the hound? Yet the fellow is good-looking and soft-spoken; and what can a creature like Stasie Verner know of life? She is very handsome. What a sweet mouth !- not too small-and that look of perfect health in her fine velvety skin is a supreme beauty. Blondes are not much to my taste, but she is not insipid. I am not sure she isn't troublesomely intelligent; girls that ask questions are rather a nuisance. for it is ten to one if they understand your answers, unless they have been exceptionally trained. At any rate, it is pleasanter to go to the opera or any other haunt of fashion with two nice, bright women than alone, especially as I am quite free to dispense with them when I choose. My poor little Livy! I wish she could dispense with that prosperous, ostentatious husband of hers!"

## CHAPTER IX.

The days that intervened between this evening and the projected visit to the opera were both happy and successful in Stasie's estimation. She had broached the subject uppermost in her mind to Mr. Harding and to Kharapet, and to her delight it was not violently opposed. They promised to consider it, and that she should have an opportunity of speaking to her guardian—without whose consent nothing could be done. With this news Stasie flew to rejoice Aunt

Clem's heart, but that sympathetic relative was "not at home," to her visitor's great regret. Still Lady Elizabeth Wyatt's promised invitation to luncheon did not come, though Kharapet, who was in greater request than ever with the fashionable religious world, brought numerous messages from that busy

philanthropist to Stasie.

But the chief ingredient in this pleasant time was the frequent society of Dr. Brooke. His conversation, his presence, acted like a delightful tonic on Stasie's brain. His voice charmed her ear; his remarks, his incidental descriptions and reminiscences suggested fresh and invigorating strains of thought. His manner, frank, kindly, and utterly innocent of admiration or insinuated compliment, was delightful after the sugary sweetness of Kharapet or the rough adulation of Mr. Harding; nor was she piqued or offended by finding herself unmistakably second to Mrs Harding in his estimation, but rather more at her ease; she showed her pleasure in his presence, her keen enjoyment in arguing with him, even in accepting defeat at his hands without an attempt to disguise it.

It is not in male nature to be indifferent to such subtle unintentional flattery; and Stasie was rapidly becoming a favorite in a sort of careless, half-appreciative fashion with her hero, though at times she unconsciously made his pulses throb quicker than they need, by her frank girlish playfulness—it could scarce be called coquetry—with Kharapet. Often, after she had been bored by the latter's persistent adoration, which she scarce understood, into impatience and sharp speeches, she would try to make amends by smiles and glances which both men misinterpreted, and which, with all his reason and philosophy, woke murderous thoughts in the cool self-possessed doctor. He could not bear to doubt the straightforward

He could not bear to doubt the straightforward earnestness which interested him so much in this half-

educated, half-willful girl!

The opera was like an enchanted dream to Stasie; the only drawback was the presence of Kharapet, who joined them at the last moment, but that, too, was forgotten in the griefs of Leonora—the love and sorrow of Azucena. She would have liked Dr. Brooke's arm instead of Kharapet's coming out, but of course he (Dr. Brooke) took Mrs. Harding, and so darkness and commonplace settled down over the glorious revelation of beauty and melody, to be reproduced by fancy in the silence and freedom of her solitary moments.

The next afternoon's post brought her a note from Aunt Clem, written from her bed. The poor lady had been very ill with a bad feverish cold. She was now better, and a visit from her sweet Stasie would complete her cure.

"I can go to-morrow, Mrs. Harding? there is noth-

ing to be done?"

"Nothing! you had better see her at once, for Lady Elizabeth's invitation may come any day, and you

would not like to refuse."

"Certainly not. And, Mrs. Harding, as you are going to take Johnnie to the dentist, I will stay at home and write a long letter to Ella Mathews—she will be so

pleased to hear about the opera."

Stasie therefore settled herself to her letter at Mrs. Harding's writing-table in the inner drawing-room, but she did not get on. The music of last night was in her ears, its scenes before her eyes, and it seemed like a continuation of its delights, when Dr. Brooke was announced.

"I am so glad you have come! I want to talk to you about last night!" was her greeting. "But Mrs.

Harding is out."

"So I hear. Well, let us talk of last night by all means," drawing a comfortable chair opposite her, and disposing himself at ease. "I am almost as new to such scenes as yourself. I have been occasionally at

the opera long ago, before I went to India. Grisi was at her highest height then! I do not think we will hear any thing like her for a long time to come!"

"Oh! could she be finer than the Leonora last

night?"

"Yes! infinitely, quite different."

"The only thing I don't think I liked was the reci-

tative. It seems rather silly to talk in sing-song."

"For that matter it is all silly enough! yet very delicious. I am fond of music in an ignorant way, but I agree with you recitative is a mistake. I fancy the songs would have more effect if the dialogue were spoken."

"We must not quarrel though with what is so charming! How lovely that song 'Il balen del suo

sorriso' is!"

"The lightning of thy smile," said Dr. Brooke, musingly. "Yes, there are smiles that flash upon one."

"They are not the best," returned Stasie. "I like Mrs. Harding's smiles, they are so soft and quiet, and—just a little sad—not sunny smiles! more like moonlight!" Dr. Brooke looked up quickly, keenly, at her, but she did not notice him.

"You describe her exactly!" he said. "Where is

she, by the way?"

"She has taken Johnnie to the dentist."

"Ah! she'll have a bad quarter of an hour! That young gentleman has not a heroic nature."

"I should think not," returned Stasie emphatically.
"He is such a troublesome imp, I do long to box his ears two or three times a day."

"I doubt if the discipline would be judicious," said the doctor gravely, while a smile glittered in his

"I dare say not, but he deserves it! I don't think he cares one straw about his dear sweet mother!"

"You are very fond of Mrs. Harding? Do you never quarrel?"

"Never, though I am rather quarrelsome. I shall be so sorry to leave her."

"Are you going away?" asked Brooke quickly.

"Not immediately, but I have almost got Mr. Harding's and Mr. Kharapet's consent that I should travel on the Continent for some time."

"Almost! but a long way from 'altogether,' I

suspect."

"Why do you think so?"

"Because that Eastern gentleman does not intend to lose sight of you if he can help it."

"Why?" asked Stasie, opening her eyes as if

startled.

"Oh! for many reasons—lest you should spend too much money, for instance."

"But the money is my own, not his!"

"Well," with a smile and a curious look at her, "I dare say he has an abstract objection to spending, even though the money be not absolutely his. He is probably close-fisted by nature."

"I do not think he is—not to me. He tries to do every thing he can for me—pray do not say any thing against him. I believe he is one of my kindest, best

friends, though he has tiresome ways."

"That is an awful sentence! How is he tire-

some?"

"I really cannot exactly tell, only he never seems to have much to say, and he does not care to talk about what interests me. But I am very ungrateful to say this; pray forget it, and let us speak of something else. I am very fond of Hormuz, I assure you."

"Very well, we will leave him. I am not disposed to dwell on the subject, I assure you. So you are not to go back to school? Are you not delighted?"

"Yes; but I feel curiously adrift. Now Mrs.

Mathews is gone, I seem to be quite alone."

Dr. Brooke looked at her to see if she thought of creating any sentimental effect by this speech, but her eyes were dreamy, with a sort of distant outlook, and

her tone was as if she spoke to herself. There was something soft and wistful in her expression, an unconscious natural grace in her pose that touched his heart. She was, he feared, in the hands of unscrupulous men; and she was so fearless and confiding, so innocent of guile. He did not admire fair women himself, and yet it flashed upon him that a man might love this unformed girl very passionately. "You resided with Mrs. Mathews since you were quite a child, I am told?"

"Oh, yes! that is the reason I miss being with them. But I have an aunt—that is, an aunt of my mother's—and I hope I may be let to travel with her."

"I imagine you will always make plenty of friends,"

said Brooke kindly.

"Do you think so?" with a bright, grateful look.
"Thank you." There was a silence—a pleasant,

sympathetic silence.

Then the door opened, and Jane announced very audibly, "Mr. Mathews," whereupon entered a slight, short young man with a pale, pasty face, ill-developed mustaches, and untidy hair. He wore a light paletot, deficient in one or two buttons and relaxed about the pockets. He held a short stick and his hat in one hand, and made his entry with an air of mingled awkwardness and swagger.

Stasie looked up at him for an instant with—what seemed to Brooke's fully roused curiosity—not pleased surprise; then her brow cleared, and she started up exclaiming, "Bob! why, what has brought you here?

I am very glad to see you!"

"Well, I thought I would call round and see you. I was not at home the day you were over at our place, and—"he stopped, with an uneasy glance at Dr. Brooke.

"Sit down, Bob," resumed Stasie. "When did you hear from your mother, and how are they getting on?"

"I had a letter yesterday; they are all stunning, thanks, and awfully busy."

"And are you going down to C---?"

"I don't know—at any rate, not yet."
"Are you still with Mrs. Deacon?"

"Yes; it's cruelly slow. I wanted to tell you about

one or two things."

Here Dr. Brooks rose. Stasie had in her surprise and confusion quite forgotten him. "I will wish you good morning," he said. "Tell Mrs. Harding I shall look in to-morrow or next day to see how she is after her trials of this morning." A low bow to Stasie, a slight one to Bob, and he was gone.

"That is a good riddance," said Bob, with a sigh of

relief. "Who is he?"

"Dr. Brooke, a cousin of Mrs. Harding's."

"Ah! he is not to be taken alive, I should say." Another pause.

"Now then, Bob, what is it? You have something

to tell me?"

"You are about right, Stasie; I am in a regular hole."

"You generally are," she returned, leaning her elbows on the table, and supporting her chin on her

hands.

"Yes, but this is out and out the worst, because I was just going to be steady. I had just got my first chance, and a couple of scoundrels that hold some bits of paper of mine swear they will nab me if I don't pay up, and they might as well ask me for the national debt!"

"Tell me all about it, Bob, for I do not under-

stand."

Whereupon Bob did a tale unfold, by which it appeared that when the family exodus was decided upon, there was a great difficulty what to do with him; and by his own account he began at last to feel ashamed of being a drag and a burden on his mother. He therefore bestirred himself, and succeeded in obtaining an engagement for a voyage to Shanghai and back.

Mrs. Mathews had managed to pay off a few of her son's small debts,-all she was aware off,-a great strain upon her slender resources. Bob confessed that he had hoped to escape his larger creditors, but unfortunately the date of the ship's departure was postponed. The creditors got scent of his intentions, and informed him that they were determined to have their money.

"In fact they never lose sight of me," concluded Bob. "I should have been in quod by this time, only they let me go about to try and scrape up the cash."

"This is dreadful!" exclaimed Stasie, full of warm-

est sympathy with Mrs. Mathews and Ella, "Oh, Bob, Bob! what a boy you are, and what a trouble you have been! oughn't you to be ashamed of yourself? What is to become of you?"

"That's just what I have come to ask you," returned Bob, looking very straight at her. "Don't you kick a fellow that's down, but help to put him on his legs. You've lots of tin. Couldn't you manage to lend me forty or fifty pounds for my mother's sake? You'd just save me and make my fortune. I'll pay you again, as sure as I am a living man!"

"I am not so sure, though," said Stasie, with much

candor. "Not that I would mind much whether you did or not-for your mother's sake, Bob-but I can't -I can't indeed. I have hardly any money at all;

and I shall not have any till I am twenty-one."

"But, Stasie," urged the young man imploringly, "you live among swell moneyed people, couldn't you coax a trifle like fifty out of any of them? Don't be hard on me, Stasie. You and I were always good friends. Many's the pound of toffy we have made together; many a bull's eye I have given you; and many's the time I have pulled the swing for you till my arm ached!"

"And tried to throw me out and break my neck, too," said Stasie, laughing. "No, Bob, don't talk nonsense; we never were friends! You were always selfish; and, I must say it, rather unprincipled. Yet, as I said, I wouldn't mind one bit if I could help you, and, after all, you may come right yet. You have some good somewhere, I suppose, you manage to make your poor mother love you so much."

"She does," said Bob, a little huskily; "and if I can get over this I'll be a good son to her; see if I'm not."

Stasie looked fixedly at him, and seemed lost in

thought. "If I thought you would be!"

Bob broke out into the strongest asseverations, and Stasie recounted to him the abortive attempt she had made to induce the executors to give her a hundred pounds of her own money. While she spoke, and noticed the dull despair that crept over Bob's face, her indignation against her enforced impotence, and a growing belief that Bob was not hopeless, waxed strong in her heart.

"I think I'll just go jump off Westminster Bridge," said Bob despondingly. Stasie still kept silence, but her face was beginning to brighten. "Bob," she said, at last, "if you will really try to be a good son, and a well-behaved gentleman, I'll do the only thing I can.

I will give you some of my trinkets."

"You are a real brick, Stasie," he returned, not very cheerfully; " but I am afraid a few trinkets won't do

much good."

"I have more than you think; stay, I will show them to you; but we must be quick, no one must see them about."

She ran out of the room, and soon returned with her jewel-box, the contents of which she displayed to the

admiring Bob.

"My eye!" said that young man, "you have a heap of sparklers there. Why, Stasie, my darling! you'll save me; you'll make my fortune; you'll give me a chance for life if you let me have some of these."

"Only some of them, then! and, indeed Bob, I don't like to part with any of them; they were all my poor mother's."

"But you need not!" cried Bob eagerly; "I'll pledge them with some highly respectable uncle, and when I come back from Shanghai I'll take them out, see if I don't."

"You mean you will pawn them? I remember how you pawned Mrs. Mathews' diamond ring! but she had to pay for it before she got it again!"

"And what a trump she was about it. I got ten pounds on it—there's many ten pounds there."

"I don't know," said Stasie, doubtfully; "I can't give this, or this, or this," pointing to the gold orna-

ments, a bracelet, a clasp or two, etc., etc.

"Well," cried Bob, "I am sure there's sixty or seventy pounds' worth left if we go judiciously to work. If you give them to me you'll see how I'll manage, and I'll bring you back what's not wanted, faith and honor."

"No, Bob," said Stasie steadily, "I will not let them out of my own hands. I will go with you and see what we can get. If there is any thing over I want it for myself."

Bob colored. "I think you might trust me," he said, "and I don't think you will like going into these

kind of places."

"Why should I mind? I am not doing wrong! I am only taking my own, though I shall keep it secret as long as ever I can. Of course there will be an awful row about it, for it will be sure to be found out, but you will be away and the money gone; and, Bob, if you are not steady and industrious after this, I'll-I'll say you are no gentleman, but a thief!"

"Don't call names," said Bob, too infinitely relieved to take offense, "but how shall we manage?"

Stasie thought for a minute. "We must try and do it to-morrow," she said; "I am going to see Aunt Clem -Miss Stretton, you know. If you can meet me somewhere near these places, we can dispose of the things, and I will go on to her after."

"Capital! first rate; better meet as near as possible,

corner of Edgeware Road and Cambridge Terrace?

You know the place. Will two o'clock suit?"

"Yes, quite well; and go away now, Bob, please. I want to put away my pretty things, and I don't want you to meet Mrs. Harding."

"I suppose you're ashamed of a shabby friend,"

said Bob.

"If it was only shabbiness of clothes I would not mind, but you know it has been shabbiness all through, Bob. Yet, I begin to hope there's more good in you than I thought. Oh! if you turn out well, how proud I shall be of you!"

It was not without a struggle that Stasie had made up her mind to part with her trinkets even temporarily, but the hope of helping the family through the family incubus was tempting; and though deeply distrustful of the erratic Bob, he had on this occasion contrived to inspire her with an unusual degree of faith. Moreover, it was, as he said, his first chance, and if he lost it he might never come right.

As to any doubt respecting the disposal of what was her own, any hesitation as to the propriety of walking about with Bob, to whom she had been used all her life, such considerations never crossed her brain, and she enjoyed the idea of helping Mrs. Mathews indirectly, in spite of guardian or executors. She sent off her letter to Ella without saying a word of her prodigal brother, and started next day as soon as possible after luncheon on her circuitous route to Aunt Clem.

Of course Bob was punctually in waiting, and greeted her with a grateful exclamation of "Well, Stasie, you are a trump!" He further proposed the daring extravagance of a cab. "It will save time, and you will be seen less," he said. "I suppose the swells you live amongst would be shocked to see you going about with a young man?"

"Not a young man that is like a sort of brother," returned Stasie, whose bourgeois upbringing left her in some ignorance of the conventionalities of higher life.

"Still, it is as well to keep out of sight if you want to keep this business dark," urged Bob, as he hailed a

four-wheeler.

He directed the driver to the Strand, and, arrived there, he dismissed the conveyance. "There are lots of first rate 'uncles' about here," he observed, "and I will just put up my umbrella to keep off this nasty

drizzle, and curious eyes."

It was, as Bob remarked, a nasty, damp, oppressive day; the streets were greasy, the footways dirty, a sort of atmosphere that suited their shady proceedings, Stasie thought. She was not prepared for the sort of shame and disgust which abashed her, when she stood in one of those dingy little sentrybox divisions by which the incognito and delicacy of applicants for avunclar aid are supposed to be preserved. A faint doubt as to whether she was right presented itself, but was quickly banished. By Bob's advice she had made up her jewels into various small parcels. "It will never do to show all at once," said that experienced youth. This compelled a prolongation of Stasie's discomfort, as they were obliged to visit many establishments before they collected the sum required by Bob, and a balance which Stasie appropriated.

"I had better leave all the tickets with you," said Bob considerately, when the last bracelet was disposed of, and they stood in the entry of one of the grandest institutions they had yet visited. "I might lose them, you know, moving about. Isn't this a swell place? I might be buying a suit of diamonds for my 'young lady,' from the looks of it," he continued, unable to repress the bounding high

spirits which this great deliverance inspired.

"If you ever did buy such things you would be sure to pawn them next day," said Stasie. She felt cross

and vexed both with Bob and herself.

They stepped into the street as she spoke, turning towards Westminster.

"I do not see why it should be more disgraceful to raise money on rings and pins, or even a tailcoat, than on your hereditary estate or your scrip and securities," said Bob philosophically, while he struggled to open his umbrella. But Stasie neither heard nor heeded him. That unsheltered moment brought her face to face with Dr. Brooke. They did not speak, and he passed on without the slightest hesitation. Yet Stasie saw that she was recognized, that her companion was recognized, and that Dr. Brooke thought it well not to see her. Bob, engaged with his umbrella, saw nothing. Stasie, her conscience clear of offense, was puzzled by this cut direct. She would not have hesitated to give the fullest explanation of her presence, -only for Mrs. Mathews' sake she would not like to display Bob's delinquencies too openly. Still, the rencontre made her uncomfortable. She would take the first opportunity to tell every thing to Dr. Brooke; it would be a relief. She was determined not to say a word to Mrs. Harding, lest in the row which she fully anticipated she should be in any way implicated. But would it not be taking a liberty to thrust her affairs on a stranger? She would wait and see if an opportunity for speaking offered.

"Get me a cab, Bob!" she exclaimed, interrupting the flow of his talk. "I must go to Miss Stretton's as soon as I can, or I shall have no time to spend with

her."

Stasie was feeling shivery and miserable, and longed for her aunt's caressing words and tone of admiration.

"All right; and I will bid you good-by now. I dare say it won't break your heart not to see me again. Wait a bit, Stasie; I'll show you I'm not an ungrateful scoundrel! Have you the tickets safe?"

"I have. But stay, Bob; are we not near some nice fruit shop, or Covent Garden? I want to get some

fruit for my aunt; she has been ill."

"To be sure, there is a fruiterer's over the way."

"But what an awful place to cross!"

"Stick to me. I'll take care of you!"

There is no more desolate creature in the world than an elderly decayed gentlewoman of Miss Stretton's type.

Kindly, weak, vain, sensitive, and not over brave, she was apt to irritate the young people under her charge by pretensions she had not the pluck to uphold; to excite their mockery by little transparent deceits, at which the cruel hardness of youth will not smile indulgently, and to "rile" them by cutting speeches for which she was only too ready to apologize. In short, she had not the knack of making friends, albeit capable of much good nature as well as a little spite.

Being of an essentially religious caste of mind, she was inclined to see the finger of Providence in the misfortunes of those she disliked and the success of those who had befriended her, and she considered her introduction to Stasie the direct guiding of a merciful

Father.

The inopportune cold, which had been nearly a fever, and which interrupted her communications with her niece, was a great blow, as she was most anxious to make good her footing with the young heiress and her directors. Here, indeed, was a chance not to be neglected, and she was laid up helpless, unable to improve it!

Trained as she had been, poor soul,—in the conviction that young people were selfish, and the only way to get on was to avoid troubling or crossing them, it never occurred to her to write to Stasie to come and nurse her, an employment Stasie would have rather enjoyed. So when that young person beamed in upon her, on the dull, damp, depressing afternoon we have described, with a basket of grapes, apricots, and a big nosegay of sweet flowers, she seemed an angel of hope and deliverance to the poor solitary woman.

Weakened as she was by illness, she thanked Stasie with hysterical tears, which made a great impression on her visitor. Had Miss Stretton planned for a twelvemonth the best method of attracting and attaching her young niece, she could have hit on no device so certain of success as this unmistakably natural out-

burst of feeling.

"Now, don't cry, Aunt Clem. I won't have it. You are not going to be lonely any more. I have spoken to Mr. Harding and to Hormuz Kharapet, and they have all but consented to my going abroad with you. Indeed they cannot do more until I see Mr. Wyatt. He, you know, must decide, and I don't believe he cares a straw what becomes of me. So you must try and get well, for we might go abroad this autumn. Let me peel this apricot for you, and have you any wine? I am sure you ought to have some wine."

"There is a little, dear, in the cupboard by the fire-

place."

Stasie had it out in a twinkling. "Why, there is scarcely a glass left," finding one and pouring out the muddy port, then coloring from fear of seeming to presume, "Might I—would you mind if I sent out for some more? you know it is a mere trifle."

"Ah, Stasie, you are your dear mother's own daughter. The good God has sent you to console me for the sorrows and disappointments of my life. Yes, love, I will accept your kindness, and it is three-e-e and "—sob

-" sixpence a bottle."

After this some delightful conversation ensued. An extensive tour was planned, a tremendous scheme of study sketched out for Stasie, and various details suggested and discussed, till, to the surprise of the friends in council, they found it was nearly six o'clock. "I must run away," cried Stasie, "I shall be late for dinner."

"You take my sunshine with you, dear. When shall

I see you again?"

"Not for a few days. I am going to write boldly to

Mr. Wyatt and ask for an interview. I get nothing done unless I do it myself. Mr. Harding promises every thing and does nothing. I suppose there is no harm in writing to my guardian?"

"None whatever, and, Stasie, be sure you get him on our side. I may say our side, my love? For, believe me that Mr. Kharapet will make a determined resistance to your leaving England."

"I don't think he will, Aunt Clem. He is always ready to do what I wish, and really does the things-

not merely promises, like Mr. Harding."

"Nevertheless, when it comes to traveling abroad, you will find him the greatest difficulty, unless, indeed, he comes with you"—a keen look at her listener with these words.

But Stasie neither understood nor heeded. "Oh, I should not care for that. He is very nice and good-natured, but he would be rather in our way. He—he does not understand things, or care about art or-But I must run away. Good-by, dear aunt; I will come again as soon as ever I can."

"God bless you, my sweet child! I shall count the

days till we meet again."

It was late when Stasie drove up to Mrs. Harding's, and she went straight away to her room. She dressed quickly, thinking over her day's work with delight and amusement. She had helped Mrs. Mathews most effectually in helping Bob; she had secured nearly twelve pounds for a wedding present to dear Ella; she had completely turned the executors' flank, which was a glorious triumph, and, above all, she had cheered and comforted poor Aunt Clem, who was the only creature to whom she (Stasie) could possibly be of importance and use. "And please God, I will help her and stick to her," said Stasie to herself resolutely. There would be a row, and a very big row, when her delinquencies were found out; that she did not care about, provided

the discovery were not made too soon. Once Bob was safe away, detection might come when it would. But how if Dr. Brooke, who would probably come to dinner to-morrow or next day, made any uncomfortable inquiries about her expedition to the Strand? that was a danger against which she must guard. She stood still a moment lost in thought. Would he not think her bold and unmaidenly if she wrote to him, a comparative stranger? Very likely he would; yet she must stop his mouth at all costs. By and by, when the clearing up came, she would explain all to him, and he would quite understand. She would not for worlds he thought ill of her, he was such a grand, kindly man, worthy of being a Rosicrucian himself. Now time pressed; she must write shortly. She opened her blotting book, wrote a hasty line, signed, sealed, and delivered it to the nursemaid, whom she caught going down-stairs, who, noticing the address, and being utterly devoted to Miss Verner, scented a prosperous love affair, and posted it with the utmost secrecy, not even confiding a syllable of her conjectures to her ally the kitchen-maid.

## CHAPTER X.

This same dull drizzling day Dr. Brooke dined with an eminent M. D. whose pupil he had been. It was a man's party (the M. D. was a bachelor)—and a very pleasant one—wit and humor, culture, and knowledge of life, are splendid additions to a material feast, and Brooke returned to his hotel, highly pleased with the entertainment. He felt enriched and enlightened, his own powers roused, his faculties put upon their mettle, as such intercourse is wont to affect those who have been for long strangers to similar influences.

London was certainly the most desirable field in which a man of science and ambition could labor.

It was so crowded, though! How could he hope to secure a niche in a fane bedecked with multitudes of striking figures? Was there an unoccupied spot left for him? Yes! he might find it if he could afford to wait; he was still young, but his capital was small; yet give him time, and he felt he would make a place for himself. He was sure of his own industry and confident in his own power, with the calm of certainty, which is so widely different from the restlessness of self-conceit.

In this pleasant frame of mind he reached his room, and putting on his dressing-gown resolved, as he felt so wide awake, to write a long letter to a regimental chum. He drew his chair to the table, lit a cigar, and then proceeded to open two or three notes given to

him as he came in.

One was a bill; in the next Lady Pearson informed him she was at home on the evening of the 30th, while "dancing," in diminutive letters at one corner, indicated the amusement proposed; the last was a plain white envelope, directed in large, clear, rather straggly, writing, quite unknown to him, too bold for a woman, too undecided for a man. "Whom can this be from?" he murmured, gazing on the superscription—"Dr. J. Brooke, Grosvenor Hotel." Then with a smile at the stupidity of conjecturing, when he had but to tear the envelope and know, Brooke opened it and read, "Dear Dr. Brooke, please do not tell any one you met me in the Strand to-day. Yours truly,

STASIE VERNER."

Brooke threw down the paper impatiently. He felt as if some discordant note had jarred upon the pleasant harmony of spirit in which he had sat down to

peruse this brief epistle.

He had remarked Stasie and her companion, but was not sure they had seen him. It had in some way offended him to see her out alone with so objectionable a young man as "Bob;" but he did not think much about it, intending to give Mrs. Harding a hint that

she ought not to permit her young friend to go about under such escort.

Now, the matter took a different color altogether. There must have been some deliberate purpose in Stasie's expedition, perhaps some old entanglement. Good heavens! what extraordinary creatures girls are. What strange fascination he had known coarse, common, brutal men exercise over gentle, refined, lady-like girls! Titania and Bottom in an ever-recurring drama! But somehow he had fancied that Stasie was of different caliber; her tastes, her struggling desire for higher things, seemed to point to a different ending. To make clandestine appointments with an unmitigated cad, and then to write coolly to himself, a comparative stranger, to hold his tongue respecting her doings, showed a mixture of cunning and effrontery, that—Pah! why should he think of it any more? what was this girl to him? She was a thorough coquette, and the memory of sundry soft glances and speeches to Kharapet came back to him—speeches and glances, by the way, generally bestowed after cutting the Syrian short when he attempted to interrupt her conversation with himself (Jim Brooke). Yet what a fine creature she is! was Brooke's concluding reflection. "None of your regular beauties—but lovely! Such a figure! so rich and graceful! and those clear, fearless eyes, so unconscious and careless at times of self and her own charm, though I dare say she knows right well she is good looking. She will be a sort of woman that men make fools of themselves for. I am glad I have had a glimpse of the under-current! There is Livy, too, Mrs. Harding! How did she come to marry such a clown? but I fancy the old Rector had a hand in that! What an upsidedown world it is! I do not see why a fellow should not get on quite well without a wife."

Having come to this wise conclusion, he tore poor Stasie's little note into minute fragments, and settled to his letter, effectually dismissing the matter from his

mind.

The day but one after Dr. Brooke had made these profound reflections, he left his club early in the afternoon, and walked forth in some uncertainty as to how he should spend the next hour or two; he found himself almost unconsciously following the streets and turns which led to York Gate. He was due there, he told himself. He had not seen Mrs. Harding for some days, and she was such a pleasant, quiet little thing to talk to! in fact his cousin and her friend were rather amusing studies to him. Nor need he renounce his study, because one of them developed new and disagreeable characteristics.

Mrs. Harding was at home. She was teaching her little girl to work a kettle-holder, the little lady's first

attempt at fancy-work.

The day was warm and sunny, so the transition from the sultry streets to a shady room, cool and quiet, and sweet with the perfume of violets and mignonette, was very grateful to the pedestrian.

"What are you doing, Miss Ethel?" said Brooke

after the first greetings were exchanged.

"Making a pretty holder for mamma," returned the child, bringing it up for inspection. "Shall I make one for you?"

"Yes; I shall want it for my house when I have

one."

"When shall you have one?"

"I don't know—by the way, your friend Mr. Williams, Livy, is quite ready to settle the important question of residence and practice for me. I am to buy or build a house at Sefton Park, and assume the sanitary direction of the inhabitants."

"At Sefton Park!" echoed Mrs. Harding; "well, I presume you will look at the place first before coming

to a decision." She spoke with a slight smile.

"Your tone is not encouraging. Pray what is your opinion of the locality?"

"It is not disagreeable in summer, but I think you would like a wider sphere. However, you will judge for yourself. We have a house there, the original farmhouse, and will be going down to it in a fortnight or three weeks. I hope you will come and see us."

"I shall be delighted."

"There is an orchard there, and I have a garden of my own too," said Ethel.

"It must be an Eden," returned Brooke, taking her

on his knee.

"I shall be glad enough to go out of town," said Mrs. Harding. "It is fresh and countrified as yet at Sefton Park; later it will be too much of the suburban villa order."

Ethel continued to tell of ponies, cows, and fowls, of nutting and blackberrying, while Brooke played with her golden hair, when their discourse was broken in upon by the entrance of the eldest boy, followed by a staid, solid-looking woman. "Mamma!" cried Johnnie, rushing up to his mother, "must I go with nurse? I want to go with Harry Middleton into the inclosure. He has a new boat, and—"

"The last day as you went out with Master Middleton, sir, you come in with your feet sopping wet, and

your clothes in tatters," said nurse.

"You had better go with nurse and the children, Johnnie."

"No, I won't! why should I? I'm not a baby!"

"If he comes with us, I can have an eye on him, ma'am."

"I don't want her eyes!" cried Johnnie.

"You really had better go with nurse, Johnnie, and

you must," said Mrs. Harding.

"Well, I won't, there now! Papa says you never know what's best, that you blow hot and cold, and he won't mind if I do go with Harry." So saying, he darted away, slamming the door.

"Never you mind, ma'am; I'll see after him," said

nurse hastily, and she left the room followed by Willie and Ethel.

There was an awkward pause. Mrs. Harding had flushed crimson, feeling that her boy's words were a painful revelation. Dr. Brooke felt as if a panorama of his cousin's life had been suddenly unrolled, and for a moment could find no words wherewith to recommence the conversation.

Mrs. Harding was the first to speak. With a slight smile curling her lips she said: "A specimen of judicious up-bringing, is he not? We must hope years will improve him.

"Get him to school as fast as you can," replied

Brooke.

"Let us talk of some pleasanter matters," rejoined Mrs. Harding, recovering herself. "Stasie Verner is out; she is gone to luncheon with Lady Elizabeth Wyatt-gone in high spirits, poor child! hoping to get her guardian's consent to her scheme of continental travel under the chaperonage of her aunt, Miss Stretton."

"Don't you think she will succeed?"

"I doubt it. Mr. Harding and Mr. Kharapet are, for some reason, not inclined to let her go."

She paused as if expecting some question from her companion, but he only said, "Indeed."

"I think it would do her a great deal of good. I do not know that Miss Stretton is the best person to be with her; she seems very kind and complaisant, and Stasie seems to have taken a fancy to her. She has been ill, and Stasie spent nearly all the day before yesterday in her dull room—not a very enlivening occupation for a young girl! and Miss Stretton is almost a stranger to her."

"It was remarkably kind," replied Dr. Brooke

drvly.

"I think it was," said Mrs. Harding, a little struck by his tone. He had generally spoken of Stasie with a certain degree of interest, and Mrs. Harding, whose heart had warmed to him from the first time he had presented himself, hoped he might prove a useful counterpoise to Kharapet; in short, she had begun to think it would be a good arrangement if Dr. Brooke were to marry Stasie. He seemed likely to make a kind husband, if any man could be steadily kind and courteous when possessed of a husband's irresponsible power. And her money would be most useful to him in the outset of his career.

Mrs. Harding was a woman of too much tact and delicacy of feeling to show her hand in such an affair. She only held herself in readiness, gently to fan any kindling spark she might perceive on her cousin's side; and something in his voice to-day told her he was unsympathetic. Perhaps he thought Stasie responded too readily to Kharapet's unconcealed admiration, his sickly but unmistakable passion; so she continued quietly keeping her eyes on her tatting. "I should be sorry to lose her, yet glad if she did go abroad, were it only to get her out of Mr. Kharapet's way. I suppose it is mere prejudice, but I have an unaccountable dislike to him; and it would grieve me more than I can say if he succeeded in winning Stasie—not that I really think he has much chance!"

"She does not seem inclined to be hard-hearted,"

returned Dr. Brooke in the same tone.

"You do not understand her as I do," said Mrs. Harding earnestly. "She has some surface vanity, and she is pleased and amused by Kharapet's flattering devotion, but utterly unconscious of the reality of his plans and intentions. I am certain his proposal, when it comes, will be a surprise to her. Her mind is full of other things. She has no idea of falling in love, and she feels a certain superiority to him. Both these mental conditions make her deaf and blind to what you and I see. I only hope when she refuses him he may not turn into a spiteful enemy; so I should much prefer her going abroad with Miss Stretton out of harm's way."

"You are a very far-seeing observant little woman," replied Brooke, laughing; "and I congratulate Miss Verner on having so faithful a friend. I think you are highly imaginative, Livy. Were I you, I should not distress myself about Miss Verner; she is a bright, handsome creature, with a sufficient dash of coquetry; she will manage Kharapet and two or three more, I dare say, before she makes some fellow happy with herself and her money."

Mrs. Harding was silent. She had too much experience of what she considered the crookedness of masculine nature to pursue the subject. Some influence unknown to her was at work, and she must watch and wait. Perhaps Brooke expected an eager reply, for he looked at her attentively; but her shuttle was entangled, and when she had put it right, she said

in her usual tone-

"Are you going to Lady Pearson's on the 30th?"

"Are you?"

"Yes, I am going to take Stasie, who never was at a dance as yet?"

"Then I will go, and you must dance with me for

'auld lang syne's' sake!"

"My dear Jim, I forget how to dance. I never go to any thing but dinners — stately regulation dinners!"

"Why not? Is Harding jealous? Doesn't he

like you to dance?"

"Jealous! Mr. Harding jealous!" She laughed quite merrily. "He never dreams of such fancies. He is not imaginative enough. No; he hates evening parties, and does not like to be left alone."

"I fancy you give in to him too much, Livy."

"You will be quite as exacting yourself, Jim, when you marry."

"Perhaps so," he returned thoughtfully; "and I

suppose I must marry?"

"I see no necessity—no urgent necessity if you do not care about it."

"I am not sure that I do. It is very pleasant to talk about one's-self to a wise woman like you, but I have observed that wives are not always interested in their husband's confidences."

"How do you know what husbands and wives are

tête-à-tête?"

"True. I think, by and by, when I have amused myself and decided on my future plans, I shall look out for a wife, a nice, sensible, practical woman with a little money."

"I suppose you would never be guilty of the weakness of falling in love?" said Mrs. Harding, laugh-

ing.
"N—o; not if I can help it. Do you know I was deucedly miserable when I bade you good-by, and felt it was final!" He threw a wonderful amount of ten-

derness into his eyes as he spoke.

"Did you really?" and Mrs. Harding laughed again. "No one would have found it out! and it was just as well we were separated. You are an ambitious man, Jim, and had you felt me or any other woman a drag well, it would not have been pleasant for the drag."

"You are wrong, Livy! I hope I am strong enough to bear the inevitable without whimpering, and I do

not think I should be a brute to any woman."

"I don't think you would; but I imagine you might

be bitterly indifferent."

"Indifference is not bitter," he said, with some surprise at her tone.

"Bitter to bear, I mean."

Another silence. Dr. Brooke found himself longing to say, "Livy, are you very unhappy? can I do any thing to help you?" but he dared not. That she was not happy seemed clear enough; the only question was as to the degree of her unhappiness; her hint in their first interview that all married women were the better for a "big brother" relative of some kind was very expressive—that and her eldest boy's insolence

told much. Jim Brooke had a kinder heart than he himself knew. He had a large knowledge of the world's seamy side,—none see so much behind the scenes as doctors, for whom poor humanity is generally in déshabille,—and he felt that his years were too few, his relationship too remote, to permit of his playing champion for his interesting little cousin; besides, until you knew them well, it was not easy to fathom women. God knows what was at the bottom of Livy's unhappiness, yet he was inclined to believe her real, simple, truthful,—as to her young protégée she had managed to throw dust in her friend's eyes very successfully. Mrs. Harding had evidently no notion how she had occupied the hours supposed to have been spent in Miss Stretton's sick-room. "What a daring, cool hand she must be! fresh from school too! The whole group at York Gate was worth a little study, and amongst the individuals that composed it how immeasurably superior his former sweetheart appeared—so gentle, so delicate, so composed, no unfeminine daring, no bold stratagems, about her. What a lucky fellow that Harding is!" he mused, while his companion tatted in silence. "If he should happen to break his neck I shall certainly try my chance with his charming widow."

Still a sort of unrecognized regret that his idea of Stasie Verner, as an original *piquante* specimen of girlhood, had resolved itself into a reality of commonplace intrigue and coquetry, irritated and annoyed him

more than he was aware.

"I shall be going out of town myself soon," he said at length. "I suppose I shall find you settled at Sefton Park when I return?"

"Yes; we generally stay there till November, and hope you will run down and see us often. We live somewhat in the rough there. We have an old farmhouse to which Mr. Harding has made a few additions, and it is very homely and pleasant. Nothing to take care of in short, which is an immense relief."

"I should think so. English women seem to me

rather heavily taxed for their high-toned existence here. They lead gloriously free lives in India—every

thing done for them."

"I should not object to a fair amount of care and trouble," said Mrs. Harding with a slight sigh; "but to pass one's whole time preserving porcelain from chips and sideboards from scratches is not exhilarating."

"I should think not," returned Brooke, laughing. "Well, I suppose I must say good-morning. I have

been paying you a visitation."

"I am very glad to have a talk with you. If you

wait a little perhaps Stasie will return."

"Or, better still—put on your bonnet and come out for a stroll in the Botanic Garden. There is a cricket match or some such thing on at Lord's, and we will have the place to ourselves."

"Yes, I will come, if you don't mind substituting the inclosure for the Gardens, and then I can see the

little ones."

"Your young barbarians all at play! Very well, it is the same to me. I have not grown used to this strange feeling of having no particular occupation, and I am very grateful when you permit me to bestow my tediousness upon you."

Meanwhile Stasie had succeeded, as she thought, remarkably well at the long-expected luncheon. She was less overpowered by the consciousness of her own ignorance and insufficiency than on the occasion of her first visit, which she had so feelingly described to Ella Mathews. To-day she was in high spirits—she had had a bright, happy letter from her friend and schoolfellow announcing the delightful fact that Bob had succeeded in finding employment, a great weight being thus lifted from his mother's shoulders; and winding up with a full account of her own and her fiance's plans and projects.

Lady Elizabeth received her husband's ward in her morning-room. She was writing busily at a table covered with letters, papers, and pamphlets, and looked so pale and wrinkled that she might have been at work

all night from her appearance.

"Ah, Miss Verner! Very glad to see you. Are you not early?" looking at her watch. "I protest it is one o'clock! I had no idea it was so late. Sit down, my dear, and tell me all about yourself. How is Mrs. Harding? Very nice woman indeed—so posée and well-bred—quite wonderful! Who was she?"

"She was a Miss Rivers; her father was rector of

some place in Herefordshire."

"Ah, indeed! Then she was a gentlewoman. And what have you been doing? Any parties? I hope Mrs. Harding has taken you to hear some of Professor Holzenkopf's lectures on Hieroglyphics. You really ought to hear him-(may I trouble you to ring the bell)-the enormous development of discovery in these days requires the utmost-Oh, Roberts, has Mr. Wyatt come in yet?" as the footman appeared.
"No, my lady. Lord Cecil Annesley is in the draw-

ing-room, my lady."

'Oh, indeed! We must go to luncheon, then. I shall not wait for Mr. Wyatt, Roberts." To Stasie, "He is so overwhelmed with work about the middle of the session that he has hardly time to eat or sleep. I tell him he undertakes too much. Come into the drawing-room, Miss Verner. Lord Cecil is a very interesting person. He made a voyage down the Euphrates on a raft with Mr. Wyatt at the time your friend Kharapet was his interpreter-charming person Kharapet! He is engaged at present in translating a little volume of poems I published about a year ago into Arabic, for the use of schools we hope to establish in Turkish Arabia. Such a universal genius! I told Mr. Wyatt to bring him in to luncheon. Lord Cecil will be delighted to see him."

"But," said Stasie, snatching at a brief opportunity

when Lady Elizabeth paused to take breath, "but I wanted so much to speak to Mr. Wyatt and yourself alone. I want his consent to a plan I have made to travel on the Continent—to——"

"To travel abroad," interrupted her ladyship, as she walked quickly towards the drawing-room, which was at the opposite side of a large lobby or landing. very good idea! It would improve you immensely. Whom would you travel with?—that is the question. I should not mind taking you with us to Rome next winter if we go there. Your whole future depends on being well introduced."

Stasie's heart sank at this sentence. It would be all very well for her, but how about Aunt Clem? Meantime, having reached the drawing-room, Lady Eliza-

beth was rushing into a fresh speech.

"How d'you do, Lord Cecil? How d'you do? Have I kept you waiting? Mr. Wyatt will be here directly. Let me present you to Miss Verner, a ward of Mr. Wyatt's. I am sure you must have known her father at Mardin-a delightful old man from Mr. Wyatt's account. Consul Kharapet-excellent, enlightened man !-left this dear child all his money. She ought to aid us in our work of raising the women of Syria in the social and intellectual scale. Take Miss Verner down to lunch—it is quite ready."

Lord Cecil was an elderly young man, slight, tall, a little stooped, a good deal near-sighted, with a glass in his eye which was perpetually dropping and interrupting him in the midst of his most important sentences.

'Long since you left Syria?" asked Lord Cecil, as

they descended the broad stair.

"About eleven or twelve years ago," returned Stasie dryly, a little provoked at being represented as other than English.

"Ah! oh, I see! brought up here."

"I am not an Eastern, I am English pur sang." "Yes! Well, but Kharapet, nice old fellow! he

was Eastern to the tips of his fingers!"

"He was a dear, kind good man, but he was only my mother's husband."

"To be sure! I might have guessed it! Where

shall we sit, Lady Elizabeth?"

"Oh! here on my right." And the occupation of eating caused a short cessation of Lady Elizabeth's endless talk. But she soon took up her parable again, and plunged into the details of a gigantic bazar which she was assisting the Duchess of Pembroke and the

Ladies Lambton to get up.

Lord Cecil did not seem too much interested. He tried hard to talk with Stasie, who was amused at his vain efforts to keep his glass in his eye, and his persistent attempts to break away from Lady Elizabeth, although she felt vexed and anxious respecting her interview with her guardian. How could she speak of her own affairs before Lord Cecil, and especially before Kharapet, who would, she felt sure, oppose her?

They had been but a short time at table when Mr. Wyatt entered, followed by Kharapet; and, after a very polite greeting, and many apologies for being late, he took his place at the end of the table. Kharapet looked more than usually sleek, handsome, and picturesque. He bent with Oriental grace and deference before the lady of the house, and then passing on to Stasie took her hand in both of his, and murmured a Syriac sentence he had once explained to her, and which was all glowing with adoration and flattering similes.

"You remember Lord Cecil Annesley?" said Lady

Elizabeth.

Yes; Mr. Kharapet remembered him vividly, pleasantly, especially in connection with that night attack by Arabs on the raft, when moored at the river-side; how his lordship's courage and decision——

"Gad, I was in a horrid fright!" interrupted Lord Cecil, "and blazed away in the dark, till the enemy

got into a worse fright than myself."

"'Tis ever the habit of your countrymen to dispar-

age their own bravery, my lord," returned Kharapet, dwelling on the last word as though he loved the ap-

pellation.

Conversation now grew loud and general, and Stasie feared for her opportunity; but fortunately Mr. Wyatt was more occupied with his luncheon than the topics under discussion, and Stasie was next him.

"I do so want to speak to you," she said at last,

coaxingly, with her sweetest smile.

"Certainly, my dear young lady! I am quite at your service, only I must leave in half an hour. Tell me what it is. Oh! don't mind them; they won't hear a word we are saying."

"Well then, Mr. Wyatt," began Stasie desperately, "I want your permission to go abroad,—to travel, to study, to have masters and all that. I am but half

educated---"

"Very praiseworthy indeed! an excellent idea! We must find you a good chaperon—and—I will speak to Lady Elizabeth; she always has heaps of distressed gentlewomen on her list who would be charmed with such an appointment. What do Kharapet and Mr. Harding say? I am really so busy that——"

"Oh! they refer me to you. Pray do not send me

back to them."

"No!"—smiling pleasantly on her. "There can be no possible objection to your plan. Nor need you make any secret of it. My dear,"—raising his voice to catch his wife's notice,—"here is Miss Verner wanting my permission to go abroad! I have not the slightest objection, if we can secure a suitable companion for her. You will, no doubt, know of some such person?"

"I know of one myself," put in Stasie eagerly; but

no one heeded her.

"No doubt I can," returned Lady Elizabeth amiably. "But it is just possible we may be going to Rome this winter; why should not Miss Verner come with us?"

"I should be charmed," said Mr. Wyatt, helping

himself to some Stilton cheese. "Very pleasant society in Rome—art, antiquities, studios, and all that sort of thing. Miss Verner might cultivate herself to any extent, and come on to Florence in the spring."

"I am sure it would be a happy chance," began Lord Cecil. Here his glass dropped plump into his plate of strawberries and cream, and had to be picked out, wiped, and refixed. Meantime Lady Elizabeth had taken up the running, and Lord Cecil's happy chance was lost for ever. Kharapet kept silence, looking steadily at the tablecloth, till Lady Elizabeth came to the end of sundry proposals and suggestions.

"It would indeed be an enormous benefit to my dear young charge to be with your ladyship," he began, raising his eyes, from which he managed to banish any special expression ("Why will he call her' her ladyship," as if he were a footman?" thought Stasie)—"and until Mr. Wyatt and yourself decide on your plans it would be fruitless to arrange any thing for Miss Verner.

Such an opportunity must not be lost."

"But, Lady Elizabeth!" cried Stasie, in despair at seeing how the current was setting, "though it would be very nice to go with you, I should like to go at once, and you will not go till winter, and you may not go at all. Besides," coloring and hesitating a moment in a little awe at opposing the august assembly, "I have an aunt—that is, my mother's aunt—who has traveled a great deal, and she—that is, I said I would take her with me if I were let to go. She is very nice and kind and the only relation I have, so I thought it would be natural and pleasant to have her with me." Stasie had talked herself into calmness and courage. She would not allow herself to be overawed. It was a decisive moment.

"An aunt! I had no idea you had any relations," said Lady Elizabeth. "Had you?" to her husband. He shook his head, and sipped a glass of port.

"Well, I suppose it would be a natural arrangement. In short, you might go to Switzerland or the Tyrol with her during the summer and autumn, and

then send her back and join us at Rome."

Lady Elizabeth was always reluctant to give up any scheme of her own when opposed, although ready enough to change if yielded to. Stasie shook her head. "If she comes with me—" she began, when Khara-

pet interrupted her eagerly-

"I fear this good lady is by no means in independent circumstances. Miss Verner would have to pay her expenses as though she were a stranger, though perhaps, on account of the relationship, she might not expect a salary."

Stasie darted a look of contempt at her friend and

ally.

"Oh, that is of no consequence, provided she is a proper person with whom to trust my ward," said Mr. Wyatt easily; "people are so often liberal with money

that does not belong to them."

"But," urged Kharapet, "think of the great advantage of being with Mr. and Lady Elizabeth Wyatt. I do not think, my dear Stasie, you are sufficiently aware of the value of such protection, or grateful

enough."

"Indeed I am grateful," said Stasie, with sweet frankness, "and I should greatly like to be with Lady Elizabeth in Rome; but as she is so kind herself, she will understand that I cling to my mother's only relative,—at least the only one I know any thing of, especially as I may be of some use and comfort to her."

"Very nice of you, my dear—very proper," remarked Lady Elizabeth, carefully selecting an apricot, and Lord Cecil having restored his glass, said, with a laugh, "I assure you, Miss Verner, you have only to announce a few relations wanted, and an enormous crop will spring up. I dare say I could prove that I am a first cousin only once removed if you will permit me to try."

"Thank you, I will not put you to the proof," re-

turned Stasie, smiling a nervous little smile; she felt in truth more disposed to cry; her heart beat, her lip quivered, as she perceived how helpless she was among the contending wills of those who had the disposal of her fate. She was indignant too. Hormuz had no right to talk of Aunt Clem's poverty before that grinning stranger lord. The chatter to which she had listened had not impressed Stasie with any respect for the opinions of those who coolly discussed what to do with her; she was rapidly growing too indignant for fear or even prudence—her guardian did not care a straw about her!

"Yes," Lady Elizabeth was saying, when Stasie again attended to what was going on; "sentiment and good feeling are all very well, but you must be guided by what those older and wiser than yourself think best

for you."

"Just so," observed Mr. Wyatt, rising. "You will excuse me, Miss Verner; excuse me, Lord Cecil, my time is up. I have much pleasure, my dear ward, in giving my consent to your making some stay on the Continent; you can arrange the details with Lady Elizabeth, who has a capital head for business, and is truly interested in your welfare. Good-morning, Kharapet; au revoir, Lord Cecil; we meet at the Speaker's dinner to-night."

"Good-by!" said Stasie, standing up with flushed cheeks, and giving him her hand, "I am very much obliged to you, but unless I can go with my aunt I don't care to go at all. I shall stay with Mrs. Hard-

ing."

"Very well, very well!" said Mr. Wyatt hastily,

and left the room.

Kharapet looked absolutely aghast, and Lord Cecil fixed his glass a little more firmly to observe the different faces.

This little ebullition rather amused Lady Elizabeth, and suggested the idea that Stasie might not be a desirable companion, perhaps rather difficult to manage;

indeed the proposition to take her with them to Rome had been a mere passing thought, still she did not care to give it up without a fair amount of resistance, but she was in a hurry to go out, and had spent time

enough on her husband's ward.

"Come, come, Miss Verner," she said good-humoredly, "you must not take things au pied de la lettre. Our movements are quite uncertain. Suppose you make your arrangements with your aunt, and leave our meeting in Rome to the chapter of accidents."

"I should be charmed to *meet* you there," cried Stasie warmly, but with an emphasis that showed she stuck to her colors. "I have already promised my aunt she should accompany me, and I do not like to disappoint her."

"The promises of a minor don't count," returned

Lady Elizabeth.

"Still the minor may feel bound by them," said Lord Cecil; "I am sure Miss Verner is the soul of loyalty."

"How can you possibly tell?" exclaimed Stasie,

laughing.

Kharapet opened his lips as if to speak, and then

closed them.

Stasie's words revealed a new influence—a fresh complication with which he had not reckoned. He recalled the lady-like, limp old maid he had met at luncheon, and thought hard, how best to manipulate obstacles to the furtherance of his own schemes.

That Stasie should not leave England save with himself he was firmly resolved, so he kept silence and lis-

tened.

"Now," resumed Lady Elizabeth, "if you have all finished luncheon, I must go out. Miss Verner, would you like to go with me? I am going to young Leonardo Melvin's studio; you know he has been so shamefully treated by the Royal Academy people; every one of his pictures refused—every one, so Lady

Kilconquhar and the Duchess have begged of me to take all the people I can find to look at them in his own studio. Now, if Miss Verner chose to buy a few of his water-color sketches, just for her own morning-room (when she has one), it would really be money well spent, would it not, Mr. Kharapet? You have the management of Miss Verner's money, have you not?"

Kharapet turned pale at this appalling proposition. "I share that responsibility with Mr. Harding," he

stammered.

"I must wish you good morning," said Lord Cecil.
"Miss Verner, I hope I may have the pleasure of meeting you again, and proving that we are cousins! Shall you be at Mrs. Bernard's to-night?"

Stasie disclaimed any acquaintance with Mrs. Bernard, and Lord Cecil made his adicus and departed.

"I shall not keep you a moment," said Lady Elizabeth, ringing for the carriages; "can we put you down anywhere, Mr. Kharapet? I presume you will come with me, Miss Verner?"

"Yes, with pleasure;" but Lady Elizabeth was gone. Directly they were left alone Stasie opened on Kharapet.

"Why did you talk about Aunt Clem being so poor—before total strangers? It was not nice of you, Hormuz."

"You English are superior to that consideration for wealth which affects other races," said Kharapet; "and I was too anxious about you to choose my words."

"That is all nonsense! You know we are most shabbily ashamed of poverty in England, and I don't want to go abroad with the Wyatts. You have been very unkind and disagreeable, Hormuz."

"How can I atone? I was not aware I vexed you."

"I was in hopes I could tell Aunt Clem that all was settled. It is nearly, if you will only back me up with Mr. Harding. I would like to go and talk to Aunt Clem; but I must not refuse Lady Elizabeth."

"Certainly not! and Stasie-fair sweet Stasie! you do not want to buy pictures, do you, Stasie?"

"Pictures! no, where could I put them?"

"That is well—that is very well! Now, will it please you if I go and see your good aunt? and tell her of this day's conversation, and how you have won your guardian's consent."

"Oh, thank you, Hormuz! that will be so kind. You think I have Mr. Wyatt's consent, then? they all seem

so careless of what I wish."

"I think you may be satisfied. Give me Miss Stretton's address, and I will go there."

"Give me your pencil, and I will write it on one of your cards. Thank you ever so much, dear Hormuz!"

"O beautiful hand? O lovely lips that speak so kindly!" cried Kharapet with unguarded fervor that startled Stasie with sudden frightened prescience.

## CHAPTER XI.

WHEN Kharapet had seen Lady Elizabeth and Stasie drive off, he made his way slowly into Park Laneslowly and in deep thought. On the whole, he was hopeful and content. He was near the moment for which he so intensely longed, and which he had postponed partly in deference to Mr. Harding's advice, partly from an unwonted distrust in his own fascinations.

The effect produced upon him by his brother's stepdaughter was something totally different from any thing

he had ever before experienced.

The love of an Eastern is utterly dissimilar from what we know or imagine of the feeling; we can scarce conceive the materialism of a passion stripped of the delicate drapery in which fancy and tenderness and chivalrous respect enshroud it. To a man like Kharapet—in his natural normal condition—love was the brief fierce fire of an hour, a vivid blaze and then extinction, a momentary necessity, apart from his real life, pursuits, ambitions.

To accumulate wealth was the chief aim of his existence; to stand well with the powerful the second, and the most powerful, the most dominant, men, he had ever encountered were the English grandees whom ac-

cident had thrown in his way.

He was a clever, capable fellow, beyond the average in intellect, and, given a chance, clung to it with tenacious grasp. He had had a hard struggle for existence in his boyhood. His elder brother had given him little or no help, yet he had hoped against hope that he might bequeath him some of his wealth. Becoming interpreter and secretary to Percy Wyatt, Esq., M.P., he had guided that gentleman's steps to the Mardin Consulate, and managed to establish friendly relations with H.B.M.'s Consul there by appearing independent and thriving.

He there saw Stasie as a little four-year-old pet and plaything, and on a subsequent visit was not inconsolable to observe her failing health. From this time he never lost sight of his half-brother, and, having been called to Baghdad by business, proceeded further to pay him a visit. He thus happened to be at Mardin when the elder Kharapet died. But his opportune presence brought him no good fortune. He found that the late Consul had been for some time transmitting all available funds for investment in England. Nor was he aware that he was named one of the executors to his brother's will till informed by Mr. Harding. The object was obvious. Various sums were still due to the estate by doubtful debtors in Bombay, and an executor on the spot was useful.

The disappointment was keen; but Hormuz, after an evil quarter of an hour looked round for the next best means of securing some of the supposed wealth bequeathed by his brother. The way seemed simple enough. He would go to London and marry the heiress. He did not hasten his movements, however. She was safe at school, and when a little older, riper and readier to stand up for her own rights and wishes, he would "come and see and conquer," get the money, and lay the foundations of a colossal fortune.

He did not calculate, however, on the effect his step-niece (if such a relation exists) would produce upon him. Her fairness, her tall graceful figure, her pale golden brown hair, her dark speaking eyes, seemed to him the perfection of loveliness; at the first interview he was lost. If rich, he would even have paid out much money to be the owner of such an angel!

But when added to her other charms, she was possessed of something nearer twenty-five than twenty thousand pounds, he was indeed ready to fall down

and worship.

Yet his position with her, though commanding, did not always seem to him secure. There were looks and tones, and little speeches, and even gestures that suggested to him at times vague fears, undefined apprehensions. Though a mere woman—an unformed young girl-to whom man's love was a necessity so great, that nature would compel her to grasp the first offered there was a nameless something, a freedom, a careless unconscious strength, a self-sufficiency impossible to define that warned Kharapet to be circumspect, that conveyed by some subtle electric intelligence the impression of a spirit he could neither comprehend nor conquer, and which he might rouse to arms against him by his too hasty action! There were times when this sense of impotence on his own part weighed so forcibly upon him, that in the midst of his most passionate longings, strange flashes of fierce hate would dart through him and stir his soul with murderous impulse.

But this bright afternoon no such unpleasant sensations disturbed Hormuz Kharapet. Stasie had been kind, and circumstances seemed setting in a favorable current. How fair and friendly life looked to him! When rich and wedded to Stasie he would do something grand, something benevolent, that would show gratitude to God, Fate, fortune—whatever it is that orders our destinies and thus improve his position with his eccentric but powerful patrons among the nobles of England.

Whatever of good was in his nature clung round the idea of Stasie. Had she returned his love, she might perhaps have raised him, or satiety might have broken the spell, and he might bring her low, even to

the ground, with the degradation of his rule!

A little flower-girl trotting by his side offered him a bouquet of violets for a penny, a pinched, pale-faced hungry-looking urchin. His heart was soft and glowing with anticipation of the great joy almost in his grasp,—he paused, and nearly put his hand in his pocket, but a second glance showed him that it was not a good pennyworth, so he checked the rash impulse and hailed a Westbourne Grove omnibus.

From the time her niece bade her good-by Miss Stretton had not ceased to dwell with mingled anxiety and delight on the prospect opened up by Stasie's ready acceptance of her suggestion respecting foreign travel.

Nothing could possibly have offered, more desirable or full of promise. The relationship between herself and her intended protégée would give her quite a different position from that of merely a paid chaperon. "I will not stick out for high pay either," she thought. "I see they are inclined to keep her tight. Stasie is a dear, generous, high-minded girl, just like what I used to be when I was her age, and she will not let me want for any thing. I should not wonder that she made me a nice little allowance when she comes into her property if she does not marry! Poor dear! it would be much more for her own happiness not to marry young!" and in a half-unconscious way Aunt Clem resolved to do

her best for that happiness by keeping presumptuous suitors at a distance.

Time had not robbed Aunt Clem of her imaginative powers, and the present being generally dark, drear, or difficult, she never failed to deck the future in the brightest and most charming colors. Each fresh "dear young creature" she undertook, was an angel, who would no doubt prove a friend for life; and as each cruelly and heartlessly disappointed her, she set to work to build new castles in the air. But a welldowered niece was something not to be had every day; and with what Aunt Clem (who was a very religious woman) called pious gratitude, she determined to be all that was affectionate and complaisant to Stasie and those connected with her.

The severe cold from which she had suffered had weakened her considerably, and she felt low and trem ulously eager for news of Stasie's progress in obtaining her guardian's sanction for their scheme. "I must try and get up my strength," she thought, "for we may have to start soon. It is very fine to-day; I will go out for a little walk, the air will do me good. What a fright I look! rest and good food would soon set me up. I almost wish that dear child would be content to have a pretty house in London or its neighborhood. I don't feel quite equal to trapesing about the continent, and eating those table d' hôte messes. What is it? come in," this in answer to a knock at the door; enter the household slavey with a card cautiously held in an interior fold of her apron.

"The gentleman is below, shall I tell him to come

up, miss?"

'Up here? into my bed-room! You are indeed ignorant, Jemima! I will come down; can I not see him in the back parlor?"

"Yes, 'm," and the girl retired sulkily.
"It is the executor," said Miss Stretton to herself. "It's a mercy I was dressed and had my bonnet on; I wonder what he has come about? to say Stasie cannot

be placed with me!" With an aching anxious heart

the poor lady descended the stairs.

Kharapet was in the sole possession of the shabby little parlor—the infirmary for unsound, halt, and maimed furniture, when Miss Stretton entered. He was standing in the window, the soft and rather picturesque felt hat which he affected as a compromise with British head gear in his hand, his attitude a very fair reproduction of Mr. Wyatt's favorite pose when listening to a crotchety constituent.

He greeted Aunt Clem with one of his best bows

to which she responded by an elegant courtesy.

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Kharapet?" she said sweetly. Mr. Kharapet bowed again, and took a chair. "To what may I owe the honor of this visit?" asked Miss Stretton, as Kharapet, according to his cus-

tom, left the initiative to her.

"I have come as ambassador from your niece, Miss Verner," he replied in the most carefully softened voice. "She begged me to explain to you that she is obliged to go out driving with our kind friend Lady Elizabeth Wyatt, and cannot therefore call upon you as she wished. I am also anxious to improve my acquaintance with so near and valued a relative of my poor brother's adopted daughter."

"You are very good," murmured Aunt Clem, still

uneasy.

"More," resumed Kharapet, "I am commissioned to tell you that Mr. Wyatt—Stasie's guardian—sees no objection to her going abroad. My Lady Elizabeth suggested that her husband's ward might travel under her protection, but your niece bravely and resolutely declared that she had promised to go with you, and would go with no one else."

"Sweet child!" ejaculated Miss Stretton, her hand-

kerchief to her eyes.

"I need not say that I am anxious to carry out her wishes," continued the Syrian, "but I am not alone in my office of executor. I have to manage as best I can

with my colleague, Mr. Harding, an excellent man of business, but less sympathetic than myself with the natural desires of a young and charming creature."

He paused and looked at Miss Stretton, not knowing exactly how to shape his course. Time was pressing, and he was engaged for five o'clock tea at the

Dowager Lady Kilconquhar's.

He had spent the moments while waiting for Miss Stretton in looking at the books on a small center table, and had picked out a volume of severely evangelical sermons, on the fly-leaf of which was inscribed, "Miss C. Stretton, with Christian greetings from the writer."

"Do you think, sir, that Mr. Harding would object to my niece residing with me?" asked poor Aunt

Clem tremulously, as he was thus reflecting.

"He can have no reasonable objection, my dear lady. Still, I cannot answer for him. He is my very good friend, and Mrs. Harding is also good, very good; but I venture to speak frankly to you—there is no trace of devotion in the household—the world and the things of the world alone occupy them. I may seem too severe in my ideas—they may not suit yours; but I cling to my faith, all the closer because I have felt the whip of persecution."

"Indeed, I am rejoiced to hear you express such opinions. They have long been mine. They have been my support under many trials. Yes, I quite agree with you; that dear child should not be wholly left to such guidance—perhaps an absence from England—but," interrupting herself, "Mr. Harding's opposition may prove an insurmountable obstacle. What

do you think?" anxiously.

"I hope not. In fact, I am not without influence, and I am prepared to use that influence on your behalf. The strong attachment which Miss Verner has conceived for you, the evident similarity of our opinions on most important points, disposes me to think you would be a kind and judicious companion,

especially if you would condescend to be in some measure guided by my counsels."

"I shall be most happy, my dear sir, to have the benefit of your advice."

"Then, Miss Stretton, may I trust you not to divulge to any one, especially not to Stasie, what I am about to confide in you?"

"Ah, you may trust me, Mr. Kharapet. I have been

the depository of many secrets."

"Then," said he, drawing his chair nearer to her and lowering his voice, "I will trust you. Miss Stretton, my highest hope is to call our dear Stasie my wife! I am already connected with her. I am of the same faith -of an older branch of the Universal Church. I am the favored guest of some of your greatest nobles. I state these facts to show that I am not unworthy of your niece; but I am not quite sure that Mr. Harding really favors my pretensions. He does not openly oppose me, yet there is something not quite friendly in his aspect. Dear Miss Stretton, give me your effectual aid and you will find"—slowly and emphatically— "that I am not ungrateful."

"What does he mean?" thought Miss Stretton, while she said, "Is Stasie, then, not aware? Do you

think her well disposed towards you?"

"How can I tell!" exclaimed Kharapet, clasping his fine brown hands together, and resting them on the table near him. "She is so young—so inexperienced, so unsuspecting. She thinks she wants to study, to travel—a thousand things; but when I speak to her, when I tell her how my life, my hopes, my all hang upon her, the hidden springs of passion, of affection will rise, and respond, and bless me. I am sure-at least, I think I am sure-of her guardian's consent; but should I be accepted by your niece, the marriage may not take place for some time. I cannot tell, difficulties may arise; and it is during this period of an engagement that I should like her to be with you, where I might have unrestrained access to her."

"I feel a little bewildered, Mr. Kharapet," returned Aunt Clem, still uneasy, yet hopeful. "I certainly do not know you much; but from what you say, and indeed my own observation, I am sure you would make my dear Stasie happy. Of course I have only found her to lose her, but I must not think of self."

"No, madam. You must leave it to me—to us, I hope I may say—to think of and for you. If in this matter you befriend me, I will assist Stasie to do that which I know she would wish—that is, to insure your future against the necessity"—he paused and looked round—"of living in an apartment so ill-suited

to a lady of your condition as this."

"You are too kind! too considerate!" cried poor Aunt Clem, deeply affected. "Mine has been a life of trial and—and privation; and I honestly confess that the prospect of a little peace and comfort is as unexpected as it is delightful. I know I have no claim on my dear niece, but I am ready to do all I can for her, and for you. Your great kindness proves that you are worthy to be her husband. I don't care to go dragging about the Continent, though I will go if necessary. I don't want much, Mr. Kharapet; a little ease of mind, now that I am not so strong as I used to be, would indeed be a boon."

"Trust to me!" returned Kharapet, rising, his black eyes shining on her as he smiled a soft caressing smile. "I will see that the future shall have no terrors for you. Probably Stasie will call on you to-morrow. Pray use your influence against the Mathews family. I distrust them. They have tried to get

money out of Stasie."

"How unprincipled!" cried Aunt Clem indig-

nantly.

"Let us say nothing against them," returned Kharapet, "for Stasie is very tenacious of her likings. They have left London. Might I suggest that when Stasie comes you do not oppose her schemes; let her talk of plans and arrangements—a few days may bring a

change. Above all, do not permit her to think we have entered into this little compact. It would injure you in her opinion—very unjustly—yet it would so. I am disposed to have unbounded confidence in you. I am by nature deeply grateful to those who assist me; but, as is usual with such natures, perhaps a little unforgiving to those who cross me. We, however, are sure to act in unison, for we have the same motive—the welfare, the happiness of our dear Stasie. Your excellent tact may suggest little words of sympathetic goodwill which will help me in her estimation, for she thinks much of you."

"I feel I can most conscientiously forward your wishes," replied Aunt Clem with some solemnity.

They shook hands cordially, and with some more

complimentary speeches bade each other adieu.

"Well!" thought Aunt Clem, as she slowly climbed to her bedroom, "I am thankful I was not out when he came. It has not been a bad day's work for me! I would rather have had the dear child all to myself, but that would not last long; some greedy fellow would be sure to pick her up. Now, Mr. Kharapet is a truly religious, sensible, superior man, in the very best society,—and so handsome! Then we know who he is, and that is a great comfort. He is a sort of man one can trust, and I feel that Providence has directed the whole thing. I can really hardly believe that I can face the future with hope!—A cup of tea will be a great refreshment. I'll ring, and give that disagreeable girl a shilling; then she'll be more civil and boil my kettle for me."

Nor was Kharapet less content. He had a vague suspicion that there were difficulties to be overcome before he could call Stasie his own absolutely, and he felt that in Miss Stretton he had secured a useful, pliable tool. He had not committed himself to any thing definite; yet had raised hopes which he could fulfill cheaply, in the letter; as to the spirit, each was free to form his or her theory; for the rest, the excel-

lent lady was rather agreeable to him, her tone of admiring amiability was very soothing and acceptable to a man who was perpetually in the presence of those to whom he felt obliged to pay the same tribute himself.

"She has evidently gained a strong hold on Stasie," he thought; "and even after she has accepted me it will be well to have her aunt's friendship and help."

While these schemes revolved round the unconscious Stasie, she went her way bright and unruffled. A little note from Aunt Clem thanked her in elegant phraseology for sending so charming and agreeable an envoy to tell of her success so far. She described her delight in looking forward to companionship with her dear Stasie, and promised to come and see her soon. This missive put Stasie in the highest good-humor with Kharapet, although she did not quite forget the startling effect of his parting words at Lady Elizabeth Wyatt's.

She was so accustomed to his flattering speeches, so used to account for them in her own mind as Eastern hyperbole, so amused at his *empressement*, that she was

blind to the reality beneath it all.

Moreover, she was deeply impressed by Dr. Brooke. He filled her mind, to the exclusion of Kharapet and

his sugary compliments.

She was unconscious of the hold Brooke had upon her imagination, because there was something fresh, something legitimately interesting, in their conversations, which were always free from the least approach to what could be called flirting. She, therefore never hesitated to let her thoughts dwell upon him. She compared him with all her favorite heroes in history and fiction, and found that, although inferior in some respects, he was undoubtedly equal in others, and so struck a satisfactory balance.

The few days that intervened between her luncheon

at Lady Elizabeth's and the dance at Lady Pearson's were actively and agreeably employed in preparing for her first ball.

The delights of such an occupation have been often enlarged upon, and to no one could it bring greater pleasure than to Stasie. She knew, in a large-minded way, that she was handsome; but she did not dwell upon the idea, only she found herself unusually anxious about the fit and becomingness of her costume. However, Mrs. Harding employed a good *modiste*, and the result was successful.

A diaphanous cloud of white gauze, its draperies caught up with ferns and wild roses; her abundant hair, arranged with cunning simplicity, produced an effect which elicited some very forcible expressions of admiration from her host when she presented herself in the drawing-room, where Mrs. Harding was waiting for her. Her figure and style were well adapted for evening dress. The creamy fineness of her skin, the unconscious dignity which came from her height—her natural carriage, and the setting on of her head—gave her an air of distinction more suited to the descendant of a noble line than to the scion of a semi-genteel family.

"You look very nice indeed," said Mrs. Harding

kindly.

"I am sure, so do you," cried Stasie in frank admiration. "I never saw you in full dress before." Mrs. Harding's costume was of white silk and black lace, with damask roses in her hair. She looked as she generally did, graceful, refined, complete.

"She ain't bad; but she'll never be such a stunner as you are, Stasie!" said Mr. Harding, turning his back on his wife. "Then you see you are fresher by

ten years at least."

Stasie looked uneasily at Mrs. Harding to see how she took this speech, the brutality of which seemed so unpardonable that for the moment it chilled the young débutante's joyous mood. But Mrs. Harding looked serene and unmoved.

"I think Kharapet will be at the end of his tether in the way of compliments when he sees you to-night," continued Mr. Harding, as the carriage door closed on them, and they rolled away toward the festive scene.

"He will be spared that strain on his resources. He

is not invited," said Mrs. Harding.

"How is that? Why did you not get him a card?"

"He does not approve of dancing, and he does not

know how to dance."

"Excellent reasons," said Stasie, laughing; she was somehow relieved to find that for this evening she should be free from the observation of her Eastern friend. It seemed as if Mrs. Harding's words had

filled up her measure of delight.

Lady Pearson's was a large house in the then new district behind Westbourne Terrace. The ball-room and approaches were brilliantly lighted and decorated with flowers in the usual fashion. There was nothing more or less in the arrangements than in those of fifty other parties going on in London that evening, but to Stasie's inexperience it seemed fairyland, a scene of enchantment. She felt tremulous with excitement as she ascended the stair leaning on Mr. Harding's arm, and following closely on her chaperon's footsteps. In truth, though she did not acknowledge it even in "communing with her own heart," she was nervously anxious to meet Dr. Brooke. It was a week since she had seen him - not since that disagreeable expedition of hers with Bob Mathews to the Strand, when she had encountered him so unexpectedly.

She had looked for him oftener than she would have confessed, although she had once exclaimed to Mrs. Harding, "I wonder what has become of Dr. Brooke?" and had been satisfied with her reply, "There are some Indian friends of his in town,—the people he was staying with in Wales,—and he is a good deal with

them."

But now, in her new dress, and conscious of looking well, she longed to hear his half-grave playful comments on her first appearance in public. His remarks generally had a tinge of elderly-brotherly superiority, with a strain of suppressed warmth breathing through. She would be able to talk to him too without being bored by Kharapet, or feeling it necessary to atone for her occasional, nay frequent, preference of Brooke's conversation. A quick glance, first round the tea-100m, and then at the groups, looking on at the first quadrille just begun as they entered, showed her he had not yet appeared. Stasie's thoughts, however, were agreeably diverted by Lady Pearson, who after greeting them at the entrance of the ball-room, called up a slight gentleman-like well-set-up young man, with a correct button-hole bouquet, and accurately parted hair, "Let me introduce my son, Miss Verner," she said, whereupon he immediately took the card she had just received, and, saying, "May I ask for two dances? the next waltz, and the lancers later on," began to inscribe his name.

"Oh yes, the waltz certainly; but I do not think I

could ever manage the lancers!"

"Permit me to be your pilot!" said the young man, returning the card with a bow. "Meantime, you are in a draught here; will you come to the other side of the room? the quadrille is nearly over;" and he offered his arm.

Stasie, not quite sure of her ground, glanced at Mrs. Harding, who, with a smile and nod, said, "You will

find me on the sofa there, near the fire-place."

Stasie, therefore, accepted the offered arm, and walked away pleased with her cavalier, who was well supplied with small talk. "You were not at Mrs. Broadhurst's party last night, Miss Verner? It was rather slow—a lot of singing and fiddling first, and then a dance when one had grown limp with heat."

"This is the first real party I ever was at," said Stasie, "except one, and that was only a reception."

"I know! awful concerns those receptions! I am proud to think I shall be your first partner at your first dance." Stasie laughed, and soon found herself asking and answering questions respecting herself and her partner. He was in a cavalry regiment he told her, and had a few days' leave to run up for his mother's dance. "Very lucky for him," he added with a complimentary smile and glance. He was quartered in a horrible place, Manchester, and hoped the regiment would soon be sent to India, and so on. While they talked easily together, another gentleman was brought up by Lady Pearson, and a third was presented by Stasie's own partner.

Her card was being rapidly filled, till she almost feared she would not have a dance left for Dr. Brooke. "I suppose he dances," she thought,

never doubting that he would ask her.

But the first chords of the waltz were sounding, and she glided into the delightful dance. Young Pearson was an excellent partner, and though doubtful of her own powers, Stasie soon felt safe in the hands, or rather the arms, of her guide.

## CHAPTER XII.

In the height of her enjoyment, flattered at being so eagerly sought (not dreaming that a rumor had run through the room proclaiming her heir to the untold wealth of an Eastern potentate), hoping that Dr. Brooke might witness her success, Stasie had paused for a few moments' rest, and smiling not without some coquetry on her cavalier, who was ready to proclaim her the jolliest girl he had ever met—"so bright and up to fun, none of your fast ones either!" when she saw Dr. Brooke come in by a door exactly opposite where she stood. She was quite sure, in some occult

way, that he saw her, yet he made no sign, and after looking round the room, he walked over to where Mrs. Harding sat engaged in intermittent talk with a stout

and gorgeous dowager.

Stasie's partner soon started her off again. "Don't let us lose the finish," he said. "They will soon stop;" but through the throng, and in spite of her rapid gyrations, she could see Brooke leaning on the corner of the chimney-piece, and talking to his cousin, evidently with interest and animation. Then just as the music ceased, Mrs. Harding rose, took his arm, and went away. "My chaperon has deserted me," said Stasie, looking after her.

"Who? Mrs. Harding? What a nice little woman she is! My governor is a great admirer of hers. She has just gone out with Brooke; do you know Brooke? I believe he is a very clever fellow; a brother officer

of mine used to be in his regiment, and-"

Stasie was listening eagerly for the conclusion of his sentence, when No. 2 on her card presented himself, and she was carried off for the next polka, during which neither Mrs. Harding nor Brooke reappeared. At its conclusion, however, Stasie perceived her missing chaperon talking in an adjoining room with a stately gray-haired old gentleman who wore one or two decorations, and whom she guessed to be Sir Frederic Pearson. Thither, therefore, she directed her steps, rejecting her partner's suggestions that it was probably cooler and quieter in the conservatory, and dismissing him with a slight bow, when she found herself beside Mrs. Harding. No. 2 therefore departed with the impression that the young heiress was already begining to give herself airs.

Mrs. Harding introduced her to Sir Frederic, who, after a few pleasant courteous words, left them to at-

tend to his duties elsewhere.

"Has Dr. Brooke gone away?" asked Stasie as soon as she was alone with her friend.

"You saw him, then? Oh no! He is only gone

to look for Mrs. Marsden's shawl. The Marsdens are his friends from Wales. There are two girls, one of them is rather nice. The mother is very amusing. Jim took me away to introduce me to her. I hope you are enjoying the dance, Stasie. Let me look at your

card; why, it is nearly full."

"Oh, it is delightful!" said Stasie, looking down at the carpet; but as she said it she felt as if something like a cold mist had come over her, and the lights had suddenly grown dim. But this was absurd; she roused herself; of course Dr. Brooke must pay attention to his friends, and by and by he would come and talk to her. It was not his momentary absence that dulled her, but his curious cold look of recognition without acknowledgment, and that too after the longest break in their intercourse, which had occurred since the beginning of their acquaintance. She was half ashamed of herself for such morbid nonsense, only she thought she was rather a favorite with the grave doctor, and that he would have come at once to speak a congratulatory word or two at this her first party. Still she was resolved not to allow herself to be ridiculous about such a trifle, and so went away cheerfully and gracefully with No. 3, a gaunt pale young man, much given to music and high art, which had not yet become æstheticism.

This time the dance was a quadrille, and just as it was formed, Stasie saw Mrs. Harding come up on Dr. Brooke's arm, followed by a rather pretty red-haired girl, conducted by the son of the house, and take their

places vis-à-vis.

Stasie felt considerably cheered; he had not gone away at any rate, and after this dance he would no doubt come and speak to her. But no! When the last notes of the last bar died away, and the dancers turned to look for seats—or ices—Dr. Brooke led his partner towards the refreshment room, giving Stasie a perfectly polite, but rather indifferent, bow, as he passed.

There was no use in thinking about it. In rather less than a week her friend and ally, her pleasant adversary, the only man of thought and culture she had

ever known, had nearly forgotten her!

This disappointment cut deeper than might have been expected. It seemed to quench all the innocent pleasure she took in her own appearance, to lower her in her own esteem, to reveal to her the loneliness and isolation of her position. Yes! she was absolutely alone; she had not a natural tie in the world except poor Aunt Clem, and no one cared for her save Kharapet, and from him she shrank with an instinct newly developed. There in her pretty dress, in the midst of her little triumph, envied by many a partnerless girl, she could have sat down and cried, even while she felt angry with herself for her folly and weakness! She felt quite glad, when Mr. Pearson slightly out of breath but bright and exultant that his turn was come, approached, and she rose with a smile so kind and sweet to take his arm as he said—"This is our dance, Miss Verner—the lancers "—that he was more convinced than ever that "it will be a lucky fellow, by Jove! that can get such a girl, with all her money.'

When they reached the ballroom, however, and Stasie saw the confusion of even taking places for the dance, her courage failed. "I know I shall never get through it," she said, "you had much better find another partner. I shall be quite pleased to look on."

"But I shall not be pleased to dance with any one else," exclaimed young Pearson. "Shall we sit it

out?'

"Oh yes, certainly! I should like it ever so much better."

"So should I. Let us go into the conservatory, it is far cooler than this room."

In a comfortable, dimly-lighted nook Mr. Pearson established himself and his companion, to whom he flattered himself he did the agreeable very successfully.

She was more silent certainly than at first, but that allowed of his making more play. So he favored her with his ideas on many subjects, and she occasionally asked questions which started him off again when he came to a pause. At last she exclaimed, "The music

has stopped, had we not better go up-stairs?"

"It's a horrid bore. Look here, Miss Verner; will you give me the next dance but one? I see it's not filled on your card. It's a waltz. And then we go down to supper. I'm engaged to that little red-haired girl, Brooke's friend; but I will introduce another fellow

"Very well," said Stasie indifferently.
"Thank you," putting his initials against the waltz, "that's all right. I protest it's a shame to leave this quiet nook. Isn't it?"

"Perhaps so. But one does not go to a dance to sit in the corner of a conservatory all the evening!"

"Quite true; but I would go to a dance any night on those conditions, if you would sit it out with me!"

The compliment was so broad as to be nearly rude. but the manner of saying it was frank, almost boyish; and Stasie took no notice, partly because, as the words were spoken, she and her partner passed out of the conservatory on to the first landing, and met Dr. Brooke face to face going in with the before-mentioned little red-haired girl on his arm. He must have heard young Pearson's last words, as that gentleman's voice was neither soft nor low.

Brooke gave Stasie a smile in passing, and she returned it, thinking how terribly foolish she was, for of course Dr. Brooke must be occupied with his old friends.

It was not till after supper she found herself again beside Mrs. Harding, who was sitting in the smaller drawing-room beside an elderly lady in a warlike-looking head-dress decorated with red feathers.

"It is getting late, Stasie," she said, "and Mr. Harding is impatient to go home, but I do not like to take you away. Are you engaged for many more

"Only two or three more. Oh, do not go away just yet! Where is Mr. Harding? I will ask him to stay."

"At present he is in no hurry; he is in the supper-

room."

· Stasie looked at her card. The next dance—a quadrille—was free, and then came three names in succession; then she must go. How soon it would all be over, and to-morrow would be here, cold, prosaic to-morrow! Could she ever be quite the same after the experience of to-night?—the revelation of her own importance in one direction, her insignificance in another? For a moment she was lost in thought, the next she was recalled to the living, vivid present.

"I suppose you haven't a dance to spare for me, Miss Verner?" said Dr. Brooke, coming up from be-

hind her.

"Yes, I have just one," holding out her card, and speaking with her natural frank ease, "and you do not deserve that one for being so tardy in asking for it!"

"Am I tardy?" he returned, taking the card to write his name; "modest, you should say. What am I, a mere tyro in ballrooms, that I should presume to thrust myself among the splendid youths who dispute your favor? That is the correct three-volume style, isn't it?"

"I think you are very ill-natured not to have asked

me before this if I am enjoying my first party!"

"A most unnecessary question," said Dr. Brooke laughing, "when I see what I see! You look like the spirit of the ball—an unrelenting spirit I suspect—ready to devour victims of high and low degree."

"Do you mean that it is all fish that comes to my net," asked Stasie with spirit, for something in his tone, though light and pleasant, struck her as different from that in which he used to address her: "if so, why, thank you!"

"Well parried," said he with mock gravity. "Miss Verner, you improve rapidly."

"Improve!" said Stasie, looking straight into his eyes with a serious puzzled expression; "you mean

something quite different!"

Here the music struck up; Brooke offered her his arm to join the couples already assembling, and as they passed a long mirror he paused, and pointing to her reflection in it, said, laughing, "A creature like that need not fear much fault-finding!" There was real admiration in his eyes as he spoke, yet Stasie felt wounded, disappointed, indignant, and for once too perplexed for a ready reply. Brooke, thinking she had taken in the flattery, which had a certain amount of surface-truth, made profound reflections on the intense conceit of women in general; of the terrible counterpoise which it formed, even to intellectual abilities beyond the average. Better a plain, commonplace girl, not likely to be tempted into forgetting the delicate timidity so essential to female character, than a brilliant creature whose vanity betrays her into clandes-tine meetings with such a fearful cad as that Mathews! "And with all my common sense I had begun to idealize her! At any rate she is far too attractive to quarrel with." Dismissing his philosophic thoughts, Brooke made himself very pleasant. He could talk well when he liked, though slightly sarcastic, and Stasie found him more amusing than usual, but certainly not so nice. All through the dance, Stasie did not know why, but his talk oppressed her. There was a change in him which she felt keenly, but could not define.

When the quadrille was over he led her back to the place where they had left Mrs. Harding, but she had

disappeared.

"She will return no doubt to look for you," said Dr. Brooke; and he sat down beside his partner. There was a moment's silence, when something prompted Stasie to speak of her note to him; perhaps an unconscious desire to pierce through the screen of careless civility and light bright talk, behind which his real self had retreated.

"I suppose you had my note, Dr. Brooke. I was so afraid you might have mentioned having met me with Bob Mathews.'

"Yes, I had it," he replied, looking with no small surprise at her open, unembarrassed countenance.

"Did you expect a reply?"

"Oh no! it would have been awkward if a note to me had been seen in your writing. I dare say you thought it rather strange of me to write to you, but you see it was the only means I had of warning you not to tell!" Brooke still looked and listened in surprise. She spoke quite easily without downcast eyes or blushes. "It won't long be a secret, and then you may say what you like; but for the present I do not want any one to know. I have not even told Mrs. Harding."

"In that I am sure you are wise," said Brooke dryly. "Yes," said Stasie, misunderstanding him. "It does

not do to get her into a scrape with Mr. Harding; he will be awfully angry when it all comes out, but then I am not his wife, so it does not matter. He will never speak to me as he would to her."

"Indeed!" returned Brooke. "I do not know which to admire most, your consideration for your friend or the simple directness with which you carry

out your plans!"

His tone was so unsympathetic, so hard, that Stasie felt impelled to put herself right with him. She had grown to believe firmly in his superiority, in his sound judgment; perhaps he thought she was wrong to have written to him! she would tell him all. "I will tell you all about it," she said, blushing now, and raising her dark eyes, moist and entreating, expecting an encouraging smile. She met a smile, certainly, but not an encouraging one.

"Pray do not confide any romantic secrets to me, Miss Verner! I am far too commonplace a fellow to be worthy of them; besides, I have no shadow of right to any explanation from you. Of course your commands as to secrecy will be implicitly obeyed;" and Brooke paused, thinking how well he had kept himself clear of Miss Verner's schemes and coquetries.

She looked at him in surprise, then flushed crimson, and said, "You are quite right, I will not trouble you!"

"Here comes one of your cavaliers!" exclaimed Brooke, "eagerly searching for his lost princess! I must resign you, and bid you good-night too. I see Mrs. Marsden is looking for me; I promised to see

her and her daughters home."

"Good-night," said Stasie, mastering as best she could a horrible choking sensation in her throat, while an overwhelming sense of shame and degradation made the blood tingle in her ears and quiver in her lips. To have offered her confidence and have it rejected with such polite mockery! What a fool she was, and how ignorant of the usages of society! How was she to learn them? who would teach her!

Her new partner found her silent and distrait, and by no means so fascinating as young Pearson proclaimed her to be; and, the dance over, Stasie declared she was quite tired out, turned a deaf ear to Mr. Pearson's entreaties that she would wait for one more waltz, found out Mrs. Harding, who was rather anxious to return home, and finally unearthed Mr. Hard-

ing, who was dozing in the card-room.

The sense of deep mortification still clung to Stasie when the morning light broke in upon her slumbers next day. It was none the less deep because it was modified by the introduction of a new ingredient. She was angry with herself, but still more so with Dr. Brooke; she was also alarmed and ashamed to perceive, in the introspection which the change in his manner induced, that she had grown quite fond of him—on the verge of falling in love with him! A

man who had never sought her, -who had never shown her the slightest lover-like attention,—only a quiet, gentle, almost condescending interest in her crude ideas. She might well be ashamed of such weakness! She had always despised and pitied the women she had heard and read of who had given their love unsought. It was always incomprehensible to her that such a thing could be, and here she was almost over the precipice herself. Is it possible that Dr. Brookeexperienced man of the world that he was-perceived what she now began to suspect, and took this method to save her from throwing herself at his head! It was too maddening! She wished she could scourge herself with scorpions? She would have willingly seared her heart with hot irons could she thereby have obliterated the consciousness of this degradation. That she could surmount and subdue it she did not doubt; but how should she prove her strength and indifference to Dr. Brooke? Time would show.

She must be up and doing; she would not be idle any longer; she would press on Mr. Harding and Kharapet the necessity of preparing for her travels with Aunt Clem. She would see her aunt that very day, plan out their tour, and make an estimate of its cost, so as to be ready for all objections. It was too bad that she should be thus obliged to fight for her rights! that came of her loneliness; but she would show them (i. e. Messrs. Kharapet, Harding, and Wyatt) that she could hold her own, and if she could not get her own way quite, at any rate she would make herself supremely disagreeable. In this irritable and belligerent mood she descended to breakfast, which she found half over.

"So here you are at last," exclaimed Mr. Harding, who was looking thundery. "You'll find the tea cold and the butter hot, for the ice is all melted!"

"I don't care in the least," said Stasie. "How are you, Mrs. Harding? I hope you are not very tired —"

"I am sure I am !" exclaimed Mr. Harding. "How

rational beings can encourage such fooleries and waste their money is more than I can understand! I cannot put up with any more of it. These cursed dissipations which interfere with the comfort of the family bread winner ought not to be encouraged. I had to wait nearly half an hour for Mrs. Harding this morning before I could get a cup of tea!"

"And could you not pour it out yourself for once?" cried Stasie. "I protest if I ever marry I will marry some poor man, and then according to your theory, Mr. Harding, he will have to get up and pour out my

tea, because my money will buy the bread."

"I think your head has been turned with all the damned nonsense of last night," returned Mr. Harding rather testily.

Mrs. Harding looked surprised.

"Not at all, I am quite logical—the toast, please," said Stasie.

Mr. Harding took refuge in the *Times*. Stasie, being really independent of him, and, moreover, that sacred thing, "a woman of fortune," he did not feel disposed to bluster and swear as usual.

After a few minutes' silence Mrs. Harding began to talk of the people they had met the evening before, interrupted now and then by inarticulate growls indicative of disapprobation from her husband.

At length he exclaimed, "What a blank nuisance

that Mrs. Parker is dead—died three days ago!"

"Who is Mrs. Parker?" asked his wife.

"Oh, you never know any thing," he said roughly. "She had agreed to take one of my Sefton Park houses on lease, and every thing was ready for her signature when she came back to town. She had gone to the Isle of Wight for change of air, and now she is dead. I wonder if her daughter will take it, or if she is in any way committed. I must see Williams. I thought I had a capital tenant. It's a blank nuisance," he repeated, and soon after he rose from the table. "If Kharapet comes here to-day, don't ask him to dinner,"

he said. "I want to have one evening in peace. It's all very well now and then, but, by George, the fellow lives here; and," to his wife, "you had better begin to think seriously of going out of town. Look about you, and look alive; don't leave every thing to be hurried and scrambled at the last, as usual. Time is money—you must never forget that," going to the door and opening it. "Hullo! Here's a long scratch on the panel—a scratch as if done with a pin on purpose! Look here! Don't you care enough about your house to get up and see the mischief those blank, blank, careless servants do?"

Mrs. Harding rose hastily and went to the door. "Yes, it is provoking; but the scratch is not very deep

-you can only see it in a particular light."

"You would never see it in any light! Now I expect you to find out who is responsible for that door by the time I return. I'd have the servants up myself only I must catch Williams," and he left the room,

closing the door noisily behind him.

Mrs. Harding returned to her seat with a slight sigh, and Stasie looked at her in wonder, not untinged with contempt, at her amazing patience. It was a bright, warm, summer morning; the open windows admitted the perfume of the mignonette in the flower-boxes; the water-carts went slowly past, making a momentary freshness; that especially summer cry, "All a-blowin' and a-growin'" came repeatedly from itinerant florists. All seemed full of joyous, sunny life thought Stasie, yet how bitter and disappointing were the realities which lay beneath. She was, as we know, in a state of irritation, and she felt especially wrathful against Mr. Harding, because, for his wife's sake and also from a natural sense of good-breeding, she had suppressed more than one sharp speech that rose to her lips. It was this sense of irritation that prompted her to the unusual imprudence of saying to her hostess as the outer door was audibly shut, "Is he ever pleased?"

"Sometimes, I believe," returned Mrs. Harding with

rather a sad smile. "But he rarely betrays it."

"I know it is very rude and wrong of me to say it, dear Mrs. Harding; but why are you always so sweet and patient? I am sure it would do you both so much good if you fired up sometimes."

Mrs. Harding shook her head. "I dare say it would be better for Mr. Harding to have married a woman of stronger character than myself, but as for me, I shall

never get out of my groove now."

Stasie forced herself to be silent. She had long perceived the bitter bondage in which her friend was held but to-day she was disposed to champion all the oppressed, and hit the oppressors hard. However, she contented herself by crossing to where Mrs. Harding sat and kissing her brow. "It is too fine to stay indoors," she said. "I will go out with the children. Let me take them into the Botanic Gardens. Nurse need not come. I mean Willie and Ethel—I cannot quite manage Johnnie."

"Thank you, dear. I have some shopping to do and will take him with me. After luncheon I am going to call on Mrs. Marsden. Will you come with me?"

"No, thank you. I want to spend the afternoon

with my aunt."

The open air, the bright sunshine, the necessity of listening and attending to her young companions did Stasie good. She returned to the house graver, more composed, and most firmly resolved to put Dr. Brooke out of her head and heart. She was not, she flattered herself, the sort of girl to sit down and mope; she would fill the empty chamber of her heart with nobler guests than had yet dwelt there, and take up her life in earnest.

As soon as luncheon was over Mrs. Harding went away to keep her appointment with Dr. Brooke, who was to meet her at his friend's house, and Stasie went to her room to dress for her expedition. She had scarce reached it when the servant overtook her with a card bearing the name of

## Mr. A. Vandaleur Pearson, —th Lancers.

"Did you say Mrs. Harding was not at home?" asked Stasie, feeling vexed at this interruption.

"Yes'm, and then the gentleman asked for you."
"I will put on my hat and go down; he will not

stay long if he thinks I am going out."

Mr. Pearson met Stasie with many apologies for detaining her, but he was the bearer of a note to Mrs. Harding, the contents of which he knew—perhaps Miss Verner would open and answer it.

"I don't quite like to open Mrs. Harding's note,"

said Stasie, hesitating.

"You needn't mind, it is about yourself," cried the young Lancer eagerly; whereupon Stasie opened it and read. It asked dear Mrs. Harding if her charming young friend would like to accompany the writer to the opera on the following evening, as she had a box and a place therein very much at Miss Verner's service, "if Mrs. Harding would allow her to join their party."

Young Pearson watched her as she read, thinking how awfully well she looked in a large gray straw hat, turned up at one side, and lined with velvet of the same color, though she was so much paler than

last night.

"How very good of your mother!" cried Stasie, looking up from the note; "pray thank her for me. I should like so much to go, but I cannot say yes or no till I have seen Mrs. Harding, though I am sure she will allow me. I will write this evening directly I see her, if Lady Pearson will be so kind as to keep the place open."

"Yes, of course she will; I'll answer for that. Hope you are not very tired this morning, Miss Verner?"

"A little," said Stasie; "but I enjoyed the dance."

"So did I; never enjoyed a dance so much before. I suppose I must not keep you—you are going out?" a little entreatingly.

"Yes, I am going to see my aunt, who has been ill,

and----"

"Mr. Kharapet!" said Jane, throwing open the door.

Mr. Vandaleur Pearson looked a little surprised as Hormuz came in with his softly gliding step and graceful bow.

A gleam of startled anger flashed in his eyes when he found Stasie *tête-à-tête* with a fashionable, good-looking young man.

"Oh, Hormuz," cried Stasie with easy familiarity, "I am going to Aunt Clem's; will you come with

me?"

"Yes, certainly; I am at your service." Mr. Pearson, not being asked to sit down, thought he had best bow himself out.

"I will be sure to write this evening," said Stasie,

shaking hands with him.

"Pray do so; sorry not to have seen Mrs. Harding."
"Who is that young man?" said Hormuz solemnly,

as the door closed upon him.

"Mr. Pearson—Sir Frederick's son. I danced with him last night. Isn't he nice? He has brought me an invitation from his mother to go to the opera! so very kind of her!" and Stasie went across the room

to place it in Mrs. Harding's blotting-book.

Kharapet felt giddy with a spasm of rage and fear. If these insolent young swells and their designing mothers had begun to gather round Stasie, might they not rob him of what he looked upon as his legitimate property—his undoubted right. Deep in his inmost heart he vowed that no one should take her or hers from him; all hesitation—all memory of Mr. Harding's counsels, were swept away by the wave of fear and passion that swept over him.

"Stasie," he said. Something in his tone startled

her; she turned quickly. He was standing by the sofa, his hand resting on the back; he looked deadly white, his large black eyes fixed on her with an expression of pain.

"What is the matter? are you ill?" and she came

over to him in some anxiety.

"I am sick to death for love of you!" he exclaimed in a hoarse voice. "It kills me to see other men near you."

Stasie stepped back in dismay—there was a pause. "Do you hear me," he began again almost harshly.
"I love you! you must be my wife, Stasie!" then, as she stood overpowered with averted eyes, blushing to the roots of her hair with distress, nay, horror, at this unexpected outburst, Kharapet came nearer, thinking she was only surprised, that after a few moments to take in his words, she would confess that she now knew she also loved him. "You seemed an angel to me," he went on pressing his slender hands together. "An went on, pressing his slender hands together. angel of light and loveliness from the first, and now! I cannot live without you! You possess my soul! And you do not hate me, Stasie? You have always kind words and looks for me! Promise to be my wife, my love, my rose; give me those fair hands and sweet lips and lovely eyes, and I will be your slave. You shall do what you like! and if you trust your money with me I will double and treble it before long! You shall have jewels and beauteous raiment, for all that I have is and will be yours! Say you will love me, Stasie." He stretched out his arms with a sudden passionate gesture, almost touching her.

Stasie, shrinking away, felt she must speak. She was frightened, but also grieved; there was unmistak-

able sincerity in his voice and eyes.

"Oh! I am so grieved, Hormuz. I wish you did not care about me. Of course I like you, you have been so good to me, but I always considered you a sort of—of uncle. I do not want to marry any one! I could not."

"Ah! sweetest! that is but a young girl's unawak ened fancy. Let me teach you, beloved, how to love."

"You shall do nothing of the kind," cried Stasie, with a sudden sharp repulsion. "That is," regretting her own abruptness, "I do not think you could! I don't mean to say I will never marry, but I am quite determined to enjoy a little freedom before I give it up. I am a mere school-girl, too, and have to learn quantities of things before I am fit to be married!"

"Then let me hope," said Kharapet, considerably chilled by her firmness, and almost haughty avoidance of his touch; "I will wait for you! You cannot be so hard and cold as to turn from the natural joys of woman's life; let me be your friend until I can win

your love !"

"I shall always be glad of your friendship, Hormuz," she returned, growing pale, while her manner became colder and more composed. "But do not think of love; there are differences of nature between us. Why, you would not be happy with me. I like every thing you dislike, every thing that—there "—interrupting herself—"there is no use in talking about it! Be my friend, my valued friend, but never think of being more."

"You shall not kill my hopes!" exclaimed Kharapet. "Promise me at least, to atone for the pain, the agony you cost me, that you will keep this conversation secret from all—from your aunt, from Mr. and

Mrs. Harding-may I trust you, Stasie?"

"You may! Indeed I would much rather say nothing about it, and you—will you promise to put the thought of me out of your mind?"

Kharapet bowed his head with an air of despond-

ency which touched Stasie.

"Is there then no chance for me?" he said slowly, "I must speak the truth, Hormuz, there is none." Without a word he turned and crept noiselessly out of the room.

## CHAPTER XIII.

IT was late on this eventful afternoon when Brooke, having walked back with his cousin after her visit to his friends and refusing her invitation to come in, turned away, and strolled in the direction of his hotel, musing as he went on the conversation he had just had with Mrs. Harding. It had been unusually confidential, and yet she was never quite off her guard. "I suspect she has a hard time! What a destiny for a woman like Livy to be in the clutches of a great brute such as Harding! She ought to try and keep him down. I am certain she could. I imagine women credit us with far more resolution than we possess; but even if she could, what a life for a tender-hearted gentlewoman, to be perpetually bullying her husband! I wonder how her friend Miss Stasie Verner would manage such a partner? She would either do it or bolt! How fond Livy seems to be of that girl! and vet they cannot, ought not, to suit each other. Miss Verner is bold and deep under her frank, open manner. A week ago I would have sworn she was as modest as she was honest. Still I hope she will not be drawn in to marry that Syrian. I don't like his sort of partnership with Harding."

So reflecting, Brooke reached Oxford Circus, and paused to watch for an opportunity to cross. It was the most crowded hour in the day, when the dwellers in the suburbs, having completed their shopping, were trying to find places in the numerous omnibuses coming up every moment from remote East Central re-

gions.

Brooke was not in a hurry, and he looked with some amusement and a little compassion on the rush and scramble of those who were fighting for places. Among them his attention was attracted to a small, slight, exceedingly clerical-looking young man, pale and thin, with hay-colored straight hair and a kindly look. As

Brooke watched, the patient yet weakly persistence with which again and again he strove to effect an entrance into the crowded conveyances, the pale face, with its simple, honest expression grew more and more familiar to him. His whole attention was absorbed by the unsuccessful combatant; an old playground with its rough gravel, its eager games, its quick quarrels, its hearty reconciliations, its buzz of boyish voices, rose up before his memory. He stepped off the pavement, dived into the crowd, and, touching the young divine on the arm, exclaimed, "Robinson—Jack Robinson! if I don't mistake?"

The clergyman turned quickly, looked a moment with a puzzled, surprised expression at his interrogator, and asked in his turn, "Why, it can't be Brooke,

Jim Brooke?"

"Yes, it is Brooke; and he is heartily glad to have fallen in with you, old fellow! Are you absolutely obliged to wedge yourself into one of those detestable conveyances, or can you come with me?"

While they spoke they stepped aside from the throng. "Well, you are the last man I should have expected

to see. I thought you were in India?"

"I was; I have only returned about three months. And now, what are you going to do? Can you come

and dine with me?"

"Yes, I will," cried Robinson with an air of decision.
"I was on my way to dine with my aunt at Notting-hill; but I will telegraph to her; there is an office somewhere here."

This settled, the newly-met friends chartered a hansom, and bowled away to Brooke's hotel, where they soon sat down, in the highest good humor with themselves and each other, to enjoy the good things set before them.

A meeting like this is pleasantly and healthfully exhilarating. To Brooke it brought back something of youthful freshness from cricket-field and playground, and called up kindly memories of the bright, vague an-

ticipations which they two had shared in the old days, when their chrysalis minds were working themselves clear of the cocoon which authority and childishness and the hesitation of undeveloped courage weave around the immature.

Brooke found the retrospect was cheerful and encouraging. He had made to the full as much way as he

could expect.

He had sown the seed of future success, while young enough to see it bear fruit before he had reached middle age. Moreover, he could conscientiously fight for his own hand. He had no claims upon him. His father and mother were both dead, and his sole near relations were a couple of brothers, each doing fairly

well in various parts of the British dominions.

"Now tell me something of yourself," asked Brooke of his clerical friend with half unconscious pity for the narrow limits, the unavoidable monotony which must have hedged his career, as he had confessed that his furthest flight had been to Paris for a brief holiday, and that his highest success, which was owing more to good luck than to merit, was his appointment to a suburban incumbency called "Sefton Park."

"Sefton Park!" repeated Brooke. "I have heard

of that place. Whereabouts is it?"

"Oh! about three-quarters of an hour down the South-Western line; a nice place enough, but a little disheartening. The people are all well-to-do and irreproachable, but not the slightest trace of devotional life amongst them. Now, if one had a district in the East End or at the Docks, that would be invigorating, there would be something tangible to fight against, some visible reform to fight for. It is true that at present we are in an embryo condition. We have only an iron church! Now, though it is necessary to make a beginning, these iron erections vex my soul; they are the very incarnation of modernism; they are so at variance with the order and spirit of the worship carried on within it, and, would you believe it? the con-

gregation is content, perfectly content. We have gone on in this deplorable makeshift way for two years, and I have only collected a hundred and fifty pounds toward a stone edifice. Yet some of the congregation are wealthy, absolutely wealthy."

"I know a man who has property there—a Mr.

Harding."

"Yes; he is about the largest proprietor at Sefton Park. He says as soon as I have three hundred pounds he will give another—which sounds liberal. A plain but suitable Gothic building to seat five hundred would cost two thousand pounds, and I really see no chance of arriving at that sum."

"That is a nuisance," returned Brooke absently.

"And the wife; do you know her?"

"Yes; a very charming woman! But she does not interest herself much in Church matters. I imagine her life is not of the smoothest. They say—but I never heed idle talk—that he is a man of violent temper, avaricious, harsh!"

"I am sorry to hear it," said Brooke. "Mrs. Hard-

ing is a cousin of mine."

"Oh, indeed! I had no idea. I am sure I should not have mentioned it. I have no doubt these reports are mere idle chatter."

"Let us hope so," replied Brooke, smiling at his companion's readiness to repeat the mere chat-

ter.

"At any rate he does not care much for appearances. He never by any chance comes to Church, not even when I persuade the Bishop of Zanzibar to preach a sermon in aid of the building fund; but Mrs. Harding and the children are most regular in their attendance. It is a pretty place, and a nice country all round. You must really come down and see me, Brooke. I should be so pleased. I am most comfortable—too comfortable."

"If you have only to complain of being too comfortable, you are not much to be pitied. I will come

to see you with great pleasure, however. And now, tell me, are you really content with your calling?"

"I should think I was! It is the noblest in the world," cried the young divine. "Now especially, when the church is reasserting her rightful supremacy, and truth is growing clearer day by day."

"Is it? It seems to me that the enormous amount of vari-colored light breaking in on every side tends

rather to bewilder than to illumine."

"If you have but a sure guide, you will find nothing to bewilder in the present condition of things."

"A sure guide! That is indeed a desideratum!"

After a long and cordial talk the friends separated with promises to meet again soon. Brooke in vain tried to persuade the ardent little churchman to steal a holiday, and accompany him in a trip to Switzerland and some of the old towns of Germany. This was not the time, he said, to think of personal pleasure, rather of earnest work and diligent conflict. So Brooke saw him into the nine train—the last by which he could reach Sefton Park, which had a diminutive station all to itself.

When Stasie recovered herself after her scene with Kharapet, she hastened to pay her intended visit to her aunt, feeling curiously stunned and stupid, and therefore less keen to observe and cavil at a slight but decided change in Miss Stretton's tone as regarded

their future plans.

She was as affectionate and admiring as ever. She was insatiable in her inquiries into every particular concerning the dance at Lady Pearson's; she wished ardently that she had seen her dear Stasie dressed for that festive occasion; she deeply regretted that nice, charming Mr. Kharapet had not been of the partypoor fellow! he, no doubt, was inconsolable!

Stasie felt her cheeks burn at the sound of his name,

but she kept herself very composed, and firmly resolved never to reveal the secret between them.

Then Miss Stretton poured forth a long catalogue of her complaints; and when Stasie attempted to cheer her by suggesting that traveling would do her good and set her up, she shook her head, cleared her throat gently, and pressed her handkerchief to her eyes. "My dearest Stasie," she exclaimed, "I have no doubt you observe how low I am! Alas! I begin to fear the fates are against me! I fear that my digestion is radically wrong. If so, I must not venture abroad. I must resign the hope which for a moment brightened my dark horizon-the sweet hope of being your companion, your second mother! But self-preservation is imperative! To-morrow I am to have an interview with my medical adviser, and if he forbids my quitting England, why, I must let you go, dear child-go with some happier and healthier guide than myself." Here she wept very genuine tears, for she was dreadfully afraid of losing hold of her niece, whom she heartily liked, over and above the material advantages to be derived from her.

"Oh, dear! don't talk in that way, Aunt Clem! I am very sorry you are so ill. You must suffer awfully. I do hope the doctor will let you travel—at any rate in a month or two. Even if we do not go abroad, we might manage to live together. We shall see."

"My own dear Stasie! I shall let you know what the doctor says at once. Perhaps a few weeks' treatment would make a change. My only wish now is to be of use to you. I will write to you directly I have

seen my medical man."

The aunt and niece parted as usual with much warmth. Stasie, however, returned to her temporary home more depressed and disappointed than she had felt since her days of despondency at Miss Boaden's. After all, she seemed doomed to fail in her grand scheme of emancipation and enjoyment.

That the difficulty should arise from Aunt Clem was

indeed an unexpected misfortune. It was just the one obstacle that she could not fight against. If Aunt Clem's health would not permit her to travel, why, there was nothing for it but to submit. Stasie decided that it would be better to wait for her recovery than to travel with any one else. Miss Stretton's affection, admiration, and helplessness had laid fast hold upon her niece. To desert this kindly, lonely woman now, after giving her hopes of a brighter happier life, was impossible; and Stasie decided to cling to her aunt in any case.

Though much attached to Mrs. Harding, she thought she would like something of a home of her own—a place to herself, where Kharapet could not come whenever he liked, and where, too, she thought in her inmost heart, dear Mrs. Harding might find a cheerful change from the monotony of her life. Still she clung to the hope that Aunt Clem's doctor might, after all, not forbid her to go to France or Italy. She (Stasie) so longed to get away where she should be free from all chance of seeing Kharapet, or hearing his voice; indeed she did not wish to see Dr. Brooke either—he had so evidently "warned her off." This she felt the more keenly, because she acknowledged to herself with shame and contrition she had been on the verge of falling in love with him!

A man who was in no way molded on the heroic lines she had imagined for a possible lover, simply a well-informed, well-bred, self-possessed gentleman of her own class, who showed her kindly attention until—by her own over-eagerness for conversation which interested her, and opinions which woke up her own mental powers—by her forwardness, in short, she had disgusted him. In no other way could she account for his sudden withdrawal from the pleasant friendliness which had existed between them. Well, she would not again offend. He should have no further need to reject her advances or confidences; and yet, after all, he might have been vexed about something else, or

bored, or preoccupied. Perhaps the next time they met he might be different. At any rate, it was disgracefully weak to think of him at all, and she had plenty of other matter whereon to exercise her

thoughts.

She was silent and preoccupied that evening, which attracted her host's attention. He had recovered the effects of his rare appearance in society, and was inclined for conversation. So he attacked Stasie, who was pretending to work while thinking what she should do if Aunt Clem were pronounced too unwell to travel.

"What's the matter, Stasie? You seem rather in the doleful dumps. Have you quarreled with Kharapet? I thought he was coming to dinner. Have you

forbidden him, or what?"

"No. I have no quarrel with him. I knew nothing

about his coming to dinner."

"I don't say I am inconsolable," returned Mr. Harding with a chuckle. "He is a nice young man, I dare say (not so very young either), but one wants a man to be reasonable sometimes. He's a lively companion, eh, Stasie? lots to say on a variety of subjects. Never mind, he's a devilish shrewd fellow about business. You'd have to get up early to do him—even you would find he could hold the purse-strings tight, if you ever give them into his grip;" and Harding looked sharply at her. Stasie, unsuspicious as she was, heard something in his tone that put her on her guard.

"Mr. Kharapet has always been most kind to me and liberal with, I presume, my own money. I am as grateful to him for giving me my own as if it were his; indeed more so, as I could not take it in any other

case."

"By George! you'd have to bid high if you expected to bag any of Kharapet's cash; but nothing for nothing is the rule with all men of sense, except myself. I was out of my mind once, and have had to pay for my whistle."

"Not too dear, I hope," returned Stasie for the sake

of saying something, and not understanding to what Mr. Harding alluded.

"Well, we will say no more about that," he rejoined.

"So you and Kharapet haven't fallen out, hey?"

"I hope not; did he say we had?"

"No. I haven't seen him to-day. Gad, I would like to tell him how you carried on with that swell son of old Pearson's. He'd turn green, by Jupiter! Did you ever notice the color he turns when he is vexed

and dare not show it?"

"No, Mr. Harding. I would rather not see him vexed when he does all he can to please me—a great deal more than you do," said Stasie stoutly. She felt angry with Mr. Harding. She thought he was talking treacherously of a man with whom he professed to be on the most friendly terms, and besides she was disposed to feel savagely towards most people just then.

"Hillo! are you bristling up for him?" exclaimed Mr. Harding in some surprise. "I fancied he had

gone down below par with you."

"Why?" asked Stasie shortly.

"Well, I don't exactly know why, but you are right, Stasie; I thought I'd just try you. Kharapet is a very nice chap, and, I am sure, your staunchest friend, to say the least of it." Again he looked very keenly at her, but she did not answer. He was afraid he had been making a mistake in speaking as he did of Kharapet from some crookedness of motive we cannot at present follow. Perhaps she favored the Syrian's pretensions. If so, Kharapet was a power to be pacified.

"More to please you than I do!" he repeated, reverting to her former reply. "Come, now, that is cruel

and ungrateful, ain't it, Livy?" to his wife.

"I really think you both devoted to Stasie's service," she returned, with a slightly scornful smile.

"There, you hear that?"

"Oh yes; you both do what you choose to do readily enough. But when I wanted something so very, very much, with my whole heart, you would not do it."

"When was that?" asked Mr. Harding, astonished.
"When I wanted to help Mrs. Mathews, you both laughed at me."

"Oh, but that was out of all reason. When you have more sense you will understand it all, and see we

were right."

"More sense!" exclaimed Stasie. "Am I a fool now? I do not think I am quite. Pray, am I to go on in this way—thwarted at every turn, treated like a baby, and comforted with sugar-plums, for three long years (I shall not be eighteen all out till Sunday)? I feel inclined to make you wish the three years were over. I think I could give you trouble if I liked."

"Come, come! I protest you are unjust, Stasie. How do we thwart you? There never was a girl so petted; you are going to get your own way about your

travels, and---"

"I do not think I am," interrupted Stasie.

"How so?" asked Mr. Harding with some eagerness.

"Because my aunt is so unwell. I doubt if she can come with me!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Harding with animation, and

then stopped short.

"I am horribly vexed about it," returned Stasie frankly, as she began to fold up her work, "for I shall not go with any one else."

"Miss Stretton does not look very strong," remarked

Mrs. Harding, to fill up the pause which ensued.

"No, poor dear thing," said Stasie. "I do not think she has had a very pleasant life. It is past nine, Mrs. Harding, and I am very tired. You will excuse me if I go to bed? Good-night, Mr. Harding;" and Stasie disappeared.

"I'm d—d if I know what to make of that girl,"

said Mr. Harding, looking after her.

"I don't think she is a complicated puzzle," replied his wife. "She is very candid and outspoken."

"You think so? Well, in some ways you are bright

enough Livy, and I thought you might be of use with Stasie Verner; but I have an idea she is too many for you."

"I am certain she is as honest and true as a girl can be, 'returned Mrs. Harding quickly, "but what do you mean about being of use with her? I am very glad to

be of use to her!"

"There you go with your infernal fanciful trash! Your starting a devoted friendship with the girl is about as great a nuisance as if you refused to have any thing to do with her. Don't you understand I don't want her to break with Kharapet, and I don't want her to accept him. You might be a great help in the business if you liked, and you ought to be thankful to help me in any way, considering—"

He stopped expressively.

Mrs. Harding, who was making a dainty little pinafore, smiled a peculiar smile, and observed, "I should be very happy to prevent her accepting him, if it were necessary to exert any influence for that purpose, but you may make your mind easy. She never will."

"Then whom does she fancy? At her age she will not like to be without a sweetheart. That young man

she danced with last night?"

"Why, she has scarcely seen him!" said Mrs. Hard-

ing, laughing.

"That's nothing. Has she talked of him to you?"
"Yes," she replied after a moment's thought. "I
have seen very little of her to-day; but she spoke of
him."

"Ah! just so. Now, I want to find out if Kharapet has asked her to-day. He was in awful taking yesterday and swore—no, he is too mealy-mouthed to swear; he declared that he would put himself out of pain one way or the other to-day. Has he, do you think?"

"No. I am almost sure he has not," replied Mrs. Harding reflectively. "He was here, but for a very short time; and just then young Pearson had called with an

invitation for Stasie from his mother to go with them to the opera to-morrow. She told me all about it, and is delighted to go. I do not think she could have kept back any thing so exciting as a proposal! I am almost sure Mr. Kharapet did not see her alone, or if he did. only for a few minutes."

"Hum! that's as well. It's odd about this old aunt of her's. She was all game for foreign travels, and now she is crying off; I suspect Kharapet is working

the oracle in that quarter!"

"How do you mean?" asked his wife.

"I believe he has made Miss Stretton's acquaintance, and has been very favorably received. Now, look here! I have been speaking pretty freely and confidentially to you; don't you go repeat what I have said to Stasie or any one else. I am half afraid of the friendship between you. You just remember your first duty is to me."

"I generally do," replied Mrs. Harding dryly, her eyes on her work; then suddenly raising them, and speaking with more decision than usual, she said, "I will help you heartily to keep Kharapet at a distance, but do not count on me in any thing that will pain-

or injure Stasie."

"Don't talk like an idiot, for you ain't one! Why should I injure her? What good would it do me? I'm deuced fond of the girl. I tell you if I were free, I'd cut out Kharapet. You're not jealous, are you, Livy?"

This was rather an amiable speech for Mr. Harding-

"Not in the least," returned his wife calmly.

"By George! I believe it would not move you if I had a rival establishment over the way," cried Harding, laughing coarsely.

Yes! it would move me very much," she said with

some emphasis.

"Never fear!" rejoined her husband reassuringly.
"I am not given to unnecessary expense."

"I know it."

"All right then. Will you bring me the evening paper; I left it by the window, and I'll see what the last quotations are!"

Soon the rustle of the newspaper dropping from his hand told Mrs. Harding that her husband was asleep.

She softly laid down her work, and, placing her elbow on the little work-table beside her, looked long and steadily at her slumbering lord, her mild brown eyes darkening and growing deep, with a peculiar expression, a look which perhaps acted magnetically on her sleeper, for he stirred, made some inarticulate sounds, and then half started up wide awake.

"Hey! what is it?" he asked.

"There is nothing the matter," she said quietly.
"I don't know what I was dreaming, but something unpleasant. I suppose Pearson's 'supper champagne' disagreed with me! I'll be off to bed."

He stumbled up and went out of the room.

Mrs. Harding sighed slightly, rose, fetched a book, too large for the ordinary novel, and, placing a couple of wax candles on her table, drew it near a window, sat down to enjoy an hour's deliverance from the present.

## CHAPTER XIV.

In spite of her vexations, Stasie's spirits rose as she dressed for the opera. It was so kind of Lady Pearson to think of her! and it was so delicious to go to the opera under any circumstances! She liked young Pearson too. He was bright, boyish, and amusing. But, above all, that afternoon's post had brought her a letter from Bob Mathews, sent ashore with the pilot. Bob wrote in the highest spirits, and, though roughly expressed, full of gratitude. "You have saved me and made me," he concluded, "I'll pay you one day, though I don't yet feel sure when. I think I have a

capital berth here. The captain seems a jolly fellow; there are a lot of passengers; we have a fine ship, and a favorable breeze to carry us down channel. I begin to feel a sailor already; but the pilot is waiting, so

good-by, and God bless you."

Having read this twice with no small exultation, Stasie struck a match and carefully consumed it. That was safely done. With all the executors' authority and indifference to her wishes, she had accomplished something of what she wanted. Bob was now safe away. Messrs. Harding and Kharapet might do what they chose; they could not get back the money. She felt just a little frightened at the idea of the row that would follow the discovery of her misdoings, only enough to give pleasant excitement to the coming conflict; all she really dreaded was to draw Mrs. Harding into a scrape.

"What a life she has! I am sure in her place I should run away! Yet no; not if I were obliged to leave

Ethel and Willie behind."

Lady Pearson was not very punctual, and Stasie had been waiting for a few minutes when she drove up.

"I am so stupid not to have thought of asking you to dinner," said Lady Pearson when Stasie had taken her place in the carriage; "I do not know how I omitted to do so; my son has been scolding me ever since."

"Oh! it is no matter," said Stasie; "you are very kind to think of me at all. I am so delighted to come with you."

"Yes, and Martha is such a jolly opera," added

young Pearson.

The overture was finished and the curtain up when they reached their places. Stasie was at once absorbed, and became deaf and blind to every thing off the stage; so Mr. Pearson found his attempts at even the most fragmentary conversation useless, until the end of the first act released her.

Then the young Lancer tried to make up for lost

time, as Stasie was ready enough to talk and full of curiosity respecting the celebrities present.

"Have you never been in London before this sea-

son, Miss Verner?" asked Lady Pearson.

"Oh yes; I have always been in London, but not in this region. I lived ever so far away-in Islington."

"In Islington," cried Mr. Pearson with undisguised horror. "Why did they let you stay in such an un-known country?"

"Because I had nowhere else to go," said Stasie cheerfully. "I was very happy there; and I should not mind going back, only the lady who took care of me when I was little has gone away."

"Very sweet and good of you to say so, my dear, but it would scarcely do for you now," remarked

Lady Pearson.

"Why?" returned Stasie, with a slight sigh; then raising her opera glass she scanned the boxes facing her, discovering almost exactly opposite Dr. Brooke, with his friends Mrs. and Miss Marsden and an elderly gentleman. Stasie instantly turned her "Lorgnette" on the stalls, for she thought Brooke's was directed towards the box where she was sitting; then she spoke to Mr. Pearson, who was leaning on the back of her chair, and set him off in full swing by a few questions respecting his regiment. She listened to him with great attention and occasional smiles, thus redeeming her character as a charming girl in his estimation, for in the beginning of the evening he was disposed to think she was not quite so bright and agreeable as he imagined.

Then the drop-scene went up, and Stasie, with a gesture which commanded silence, again devoted her-

self to the stage.

At the next pause in the performance Stasie did not attempt to look at the house; she again settled herself to listen to Mr. Pearson, but he had gone away to get ices, and when he returned he brought Dr. Brooke with him.

Stasie was completely taken at unawares. She instinctively drew back behind the shadow of the curtain beside her, and thought rapidly what a silly goose she was to mind! Dr. Brooke was nothing to her, even if his manner to-night indicated a return to his old frank cordiality; a minute more would show, for he was greeting Lady Pearson, and Stasie gathered from what she said that she regretted not having been able to talk more to him at her party, and that she had known him in India just before she had left that country.

Not till all this was said did Brooke turn to Stasie, and observe civilly, yet with the indefinable change of tone which to her was so perceptible, "I did not expect the pleasure of seeing you here, Miss Verner; and

how do you like Martha?"

"Very much but not so well as *The Trovatore*," she said smiling, as she returned his bow.

He did not seem inclined to offer his hand.

Stasie had time to collect herself and to meet him with exactly the same civil indifference as his own. She had made no mistake; he evidently wished to mark the terms on which their acquaintance was to exist, and she would show no reluctance in accepting them. It was no small amount of strength in so young a creature that kept Stasie from rushing into a visible flirtation with the gay Lancer; she only gave quiet but flattering heed to his sometimes silly, sometimes almost witty, talk, through which she heard nearly all Dr. Brooke said. He was very bright and agreeable, and just what he used to be when arguing and chaffing Stasie in their friendly days-little more than a week ago-which seemed to have gone away so far back; and, while answering some question from Mr. Pearson respecting her summer plans, Stasie heard Lady Pearson ask Dr. Brooke to dine with her the following week.

"I am sorry I cannot," he said. "I start on Monday for Dieppe with my friends Mr. and Mrs. Mars-

den; after spending a few days there I am going on to

Switzerland.'

Lady Pearson expressed polite regret; then Brooke suddenly turned to Stasie, whose presence he appeared to have forgotten, and said, "I suppose you will soon be starting on *your* travels, Miss Verner?"

"Not so soon as I expected."

"Ah! perhaps you are inclined to change your mind as to the desirability of going abroad," he said,

with a look which she did not understand.

"Are you going abroad, Miss Verner?" cried young Pearson. "What a shame! It is ever so much nicer to stay at home. Why don't you go to the Highlands for the summer? My mother and sister are going; it would be so joily to meet you there."

"Thank you," said Stasie, laughing, "but I intend to go abroad as soon as my aunt is well enough to

travel."

"Is Miss Stretton ill?" asked Brooke carelessly. "That is awkward for you; she is your deus ex machina."

"I do not understand Latin," returned Stasie quietly. She divined that there was a sting in his words, though she did not exactly know where. Brooke laughed. "I only mean that she arranges your difficulties for you—does she not?"

"She would if she could," replied Stasie looking at him very straight, with eyes that said as plainly as

eyes could, "What do you mean?"

Brooke made no reply either by look or speech, unless a few minutes' thoughtful silence could be considered one. Then he began again to talk with Lady Pearson, and finally, when the curtain again drew up, he took leave, this time distinctively offering his hand to Stasie. "All well at York Gate?" he asked, as he wished her good-night. "I am afraid I cannot call to make my adieux before Sunday."

"Very well, I will tell Mrs. Harding;" and he was

gone.

Stasie returned from the opera, feeling stronger and braver. She would not trouble herself about a changeable, fanciful personage like Dr. Brooke. If she had been foolishly eager for his society and conversation she would abjure that weakness; indeed, if he was going away she might probably never see him again, so much the better; yet deep in her heart she knew that Dr. Brooke was a man she could have looked up to—at whose feet she could have sat, and loved with faith and tenderness. But this was not to be, and Stasie told herself that the world was wide enough and full enough to offer many a chance of meeting heroes more heroic than the disdainful doctor.

Still the experience dulled her bright anticipations of a life of enjoyment and acquirement. Now if her pet scheme was defeated she would be cut off from the best means of renovating her mental health and hope-

fulness.

The day after she had been to the opera decided

this question.

Miss Stretton, according to her nature, invariably avoided the necessity of saying "no" directly. She beat about the bush, and if possible wrote the obnoxious monosyllable. So the afternoon post brought Stasie the following effusion:—

"My Dearest Stasie—It is with infinite regret I proceed to give you an account of my interview with Dr. Grimmond. After going most carefully into the case (Dr. G. is remarkable for his great care and deliberation, but is not so well known as he ought to be), he said I was suffering from anorexia with a tendency to asthenia, and that I required to pay great attention to diet, and complete repose. He absolutely forbade me to think of traveling, and advised change of air to some quiet country place.

"I need scarcely tell you; my precious Stasie, that this terrible sentence made me quite ill! I had so set my heart on being your companion, so fondly hoped to find in you the object I have long needed, and now to be separated from you (for I cannot expect you to give up your plans for me) is almost more than I can bear' However, the first duty of a Christian is to preserve the life that is given to us to cherish for some ulterior purpose; and though, Heaven knows, mine is a sad and lonely one, I must do my best to preserve it. Therefore, dearest Stasie, I must with bitter tears and an aching heart renounce the prospect which for a while cheered the darkness of my future. I trust, dear, you may find some congenial spirit who will supply my place. You may, no doubt, find many who are intellectually and even socially my superiors, but none who will love you more truly and warmly than, dearest Stasie, your attached and affectionate aunt,

## "CLEMENTINA STRETTON."

Stasie's first feeling when she had read this moving epistle was a kind of angry sorrow. It was altogether too contrary and vexatious! She was inclined to disbelieve that doctor,—to think there must be some malignant cause at work to cross and defeat her favorite project; but after rereading the letter she was ashamed of the selfishness which underlay her impressions, and resolved to stand by her aunt.

If she was in such bad health,—and the names in the letter were big enough for the most deadly disease—she wanted some one to take care of and be a daughter to her. And Stasie would fill the  $r\delta le$ , as she felt sure her aunt would devote herself to her (Stasie) un-

der similar circumstances.

Only by affection and disinterestedness could a home be made, and for a "home," a safe haven of kindness and rest, Stasie yearned in spite of her love of gayety and admiration, and all that youth delights in.

Of course she took the letter to her friend Mrs. Harding. "Poor thing! she is evidently in great grief at the failure of your pleasant project," remarked

that lady when she had read it. "I am very sorry for you too, Stasie. It would have been so nice for you to travel with your aunt; only I am afraid you would have led her instead of her leading you."

"And would that matter much? I am not such a

goose after all !"

"No, but you are young and very inexperienced, and so liable to make mistakes. I should be sorry for you to miss your excursion to the Continent, it would do you a world of good. What shall you do? ask Lady Elizabeth to take you, or look out for another

chaperon?"

"No," returned Stasie slowly, as she folded up her letter and replaced it in its envelope. "No; I will not run away from poor Aunt Clem because she cannot be of use to me just in the way I want; I think I should like to live with her somewhere and nurse her; perhaps by and by she might be able to travel, and we should be better friends than ever."

"Or find out that you could not endure each other,"

put in Mrs. Harding quietly. Stasie laughed.

"I like to hear you say those funny ill-natured things," she said. "They come from your head, never from your heart, dear Mrs. Harding."

"Don't be too sure, Stasie;" she stopped a moment and then resumed. "You had better talk to Mr. Harding-he will help you to settle some plan, and Mr. Kharapet-I wonder what has become of him! I have not seen him for some days."

"He was here for a few minutes, you know, just as I was going out on Wednesday," said Stasie me-

chanically, still looking down at her letter.

"Yes; but I did not see him."

"Well, I must write a line to Aunt Clem at once to assure her I will not leave England without her, just to cheer her a little, and then we can wait and hear what Mr. Harding has to say."

So Stasie hastily dispatched a few lines which brought considerable consolation to Miss Stretton, who waited with some trepidation the result of her communication.

It happened that Hormuz Kharapet, who had been himself suffering from an attack of nervous headache, as he told his friend Harding in a note that morning, had ventured as far as Shrewsbury Road, to inquire after his new ally, and was sitting with Miss Stretton when Stasie's important reply arrived.

"She is, indeed, one in a thousand!" cried Aunt Clem on reading it. "Never can I forget her truth and constancy! She will find me the most faithful of friends; read that, Mr. Kharapet, and tell me if I have not reason to be proud of such a niece." The tears stood in her eyes as she handed him the note.

"It is good; it is as it should be," said the Syrian in a low suppressed voice, while he carefully kept his eves downcast to hide the triumph which he felt glittered there. "Stasie's heart and sound sense show her it would not be well to cast aside such a relation as yourself. We must now reflect how matters can be most comfortably arranged. I am glad I persuaded you to seek medical advice. I feel sure the disturbance, the excitement of foreign travel, would have proved fatal to you. And now! if you stand my friend, I do not fear; but, in profoundest confidence, I believe I have an enemy in Mrs. Harding, I know not why. She has, perhaps, an idea that her cousin, a military doctor, who is much at the house, would be a suitable husband for Stasie, or that Stasie's money would be very useful to him. But, my dear lady, he is a scoffer, a man who believes in nothing, a materialist! and his calling leads him back to India, where your niece would be lost to all her friends! How could we trust her to a man of this description! Alas, the lives of too many Englishmen in those regions are a disgrace to their faith and nation."

"You horrify me! Mr. Kharapet," exclaimed Miss Stretton. "Mrs. Harding ought not to introduce

Miss Verner to such a character!"

"Pray do not mistake me," cried Kharapet; "I know nothing positive against Dr. Brooke, save his opinions. I only mention what I have known of others, and he has evidently no Christian principle to restrain him. Then his connection with India; the probability of his taking his wife there is a serious objection."

"But you, Mr. Kharapet!" said Miss Stretton, shrewdly enough, "were you to marry Stasie, would

you not take her either there or to Mardin?"

"No! dear madam, certainly not; my wish, my ambition is to dwell in England—in London or its neighborhood. Business might oblige me to visit the East for a short time, but my home should be here. Here I have friends, patrons—kind and powerful patrons. My earnest faith, my attachment to all things British and enlightened, cuts me off in a great measure from my own compatriots. In England I hope to live and die, and, need I add that my idea of home is associated with yourself, either as an inmate or a near neighbor?"

"You are very good, I am sure," returned Miss Stretton, with a grateful and well-pleased smile. "I am as anxious as you can be for your success. Nor shall you have to complain of any indifference on my part to your interest. I earnestly hope that dear child will see which way her true happiness lies; but should she take up other ideas, why, I must humor her

you know."

"I only ask you to do your best for me, dear lady; we must be patient and persevering. When do you say you saw Stasie last?"

"The day before yesterday, rather late in the afternoon. She had been detained by visitors, and looked

pale and tired after Lady Pearson's party."

Kharapet passed his hand slowly over his mouth, and stroked his long mustaches, while he fixed his eyes on the carpet. Stasie had kept her promise then! And as she had been with her aunt so soon after the

excitement of his proposal, and her rejection of it, the temptation of confiding all to her only relative would have just then been strongest! If she would but guard the secret, and could be kept within the range of

his influence, all might yet be well.

He raged within himself at his own imprudence and impatience in trying to pluck the fruit which was not yet ready to fall into his hands; but he was more than ever resolved that it should be his, sooner or later. Wealth, and beauty, and love—at any rate the two first.

When he roused himself from his meditation Miss Stretton was speaking in a mild lady-like manner of the evils arising from want of mental humility and the presumption of those who turned from the light of revelation to the errors of reason. "I fear our dear Stasie has not been brought up with that amount of Christian discipline which might have been expected

in the family of a well-known missionary."

"It is true," said Kharapet with an air of profound conviction, but not quite knowing what she was talking about. "You will be of infinite use to her. Now I must bid you adieu for the present. To-morrow I hope to feel better, and equal to go into the city, where Mr. Harding (without whose co-operation I can do nothing) and myself will devise some plan for the future which will satisfy you and Stasie."

And Kharapet, with one of his deep deferential

bows, took his leave.

"Well, Stasie must have a harder heart than I thought, if she can resist so charming, and handsome, and Christian a man as that!" soliloquized Miss Stretton, looking after Kharapet, as she prepared to mount to her elevated chamber from the back parlor, which was her hall of audience. "I am sure his manners would grace a court, and his gentleness and consideration might put many of our fine gentlemen to the blush. I do hate roughness! Then the way he appreciates me is quite remarkable; he sees I am something

out of the common and treats me accordingly. I do hope they will come to some decision soon, for the discomfort of this house, and the steepness of the stair, is perfectly exhausting.

That evening after dinner, when the servants had left the room, Stasie produced her letter. "Read that, Mr. Harding," she said, handing it to him with a cu-

rious feeling of defeat.

Mr. Harding turned it over, glanced at the signature, exclaimed, "Ha!" and read it through with provoking slowness; then he looked up, but instead of speaking at once on the topic which concerned her, he further provoked Stasie by remarking: "There are very few people, especially women, who can write a good letter; just see how this aunt of yours beats about the bush; she could have said her say in about a dozen words. 'The Doctor forbids me to travel; I am very sorry, but it can't be helped,' and here are four sides of note paper filled with repetition."

"Oh! don't mind being critical," cried Stasie impatiently. "The letter pleases me, and I want to talk

about what we had better do now."

"Hum, it is a very serious consideration. What are your own ideas, Stasie; should you like to find some

other old lady to travel with?"

"No, thank you, I should prefer remaining with my aunt. Might we not take a house and live together somewhere?"

"Yes, that might be arranged," returned Mr. Hard-

ing thoughtfully.

"And after a few months Aunt Clem might be well enough to go abroad," cried Stasie, elated to find that

her proposition was not opposed.

"Just so," said Mr. Harding still reflecting. "Look here, Stasie, I have a nicish house and garden down at Sefton Park that might suit you for a few months. It isn't furnished, but I could easily put in some, and I wouldn't be a greedy landlord. How would that do

for the rest of the summer and autumn?"

"I think it would be delightful," cried Stasie with sparkling eyes. "Quite near Mrs. Harding and—and rou," suggested a prudent afterthought.

"Yes, I fancy it might answer very well—at any rate, till you see how this aunt of yours goes on. She

seems a shaky kind of a spinster."

"She is a dear kind soul," cried Stasie, "and you

will please speak of her respectfully!"

"Ay! to be sure, whatever you like. But about the house—you had better go down and see it before you

make up your mind."

"Yes! you must look at the place first," said Mrs. Harding, who seldom joined in any conversation between Stasie and her husband. "I think you would like it for the summer, at any rate, and it would be a great pleasure to me to have you near."

"Let us go and see it by all means, and as soon as possible," returned Stasie. "I should be so pleased to

be in a house of my own."

"Ay! and I dare say you will be mistress of your own house," said Mr. Harding admiringly. "Well, can't you and Mrs. Harding go down and look at it on Monday? Make up your mind; I'll give the necessary orders on Tuesday, and in a fortnight all will be ready for you."

"I think we ought to ask Miss Stretton to come with

us," observed Mrs. Harding.

"Do that as you like!" said her husband indiffer-

ently.

"May I ask her to luncheon on Sunday—my birthday? or rather will you, Mrs. Harding? I know she does not like being out late. She is afraid of all sorts of things." Mrs. Harding hesitated, and looked at her husband.

"Yes, yes," said he hastily; "ask her by all means. I shall have an opportunity of speaking to her on several matters, and it will be a very good plan."

"Thank you!" cried Stasie, beaming all over.
"You are very good really, Mr. Harding!"

"What! as good as Kharapet?" he asked laughing.
"Oh, yes; quite as good, even better for suggesting

such a nice plan."

"We'll see how it will answer. By the way, you must ask Wyatt's leave, you know; go and call on Lady Elizabeth, and tell her all about it, and then write to him."

"Let us go to-morrow—that is, if I ought to go with

you," said Mrs. Harding.

"Of course you ought. I had much rather you did."

"Yes; there is no reason why you should not," was

the fiat of the domestic Jove.

"Then we will have a brougham to-morrow, call on Lady Elizabeth, go on afterwards to see Miss Stretton, and ask her to luncheon on Sunday."

"Pray, how many times have you hired a brougham

this season?" asked Harding.

"Not oftener than was necessary, and never without

your knowledge."

"Saturday is Lady Elizabeth's day; we shall be sure to find her," said Stasie, disregarding this question and answer. Stasie had not felt so happy and satisfied since the days when she used to enjoy Dr. Brooke's visits, and looked forward to the delights of visiting famous places. After all, her original plans were only postponed. A summer in a nice, sweet country place would quite restore Aunt Clem. She might even have Mrs. Mathews to pay her a visit, which would be quite delightful. In short, she built a gigantic castle before she slept, which she filled with a large number of guests. Even Miss Amelia Boaden, who had been her mortal enemy for two whole years, was to be invited; and Kharapet! well, Kharapet was very foolish to have thought about her in the way he did. She felt a little ashamed of herself for shrinking from him with a sort of repulsion; but he was sensible, and would get

over his nonsense, and see it was altogether out of the question and unbecoming. She did not want to be ill-natured to Kharapet if he were content to be friendly,—and so sleep stole over her softly like a caress, her last thought being a dim conjecture why she had no letter lately from Ella Mathews.

The next day after luncheon Mrs. Harding started

with Stasie to pay their intended visits.

Lady Elizabeth was at home, and surrounded by a

number of visitors more or less remarkable.

She was very amiable, but exceeding occupied, and Stasie with difficulty managed a moment's private talk, in which to tell her the arrangement suggested by Mr.

Harding.

Lady Elizabeth highly approved. "A most excellent idea, my dear Miss Verner-nothing could be better! Mr. Wyatt and myself are going to visit Dalmatia, and perhaps Montenegro, as soon as the session is over. There is much that requires ventilation in those districts. So I am afraid my scheme of taking you with us to Rome is out of the question. It will be very nice for you to be near that charming little Mrs. Harding, and a great relief to Mr. Wyatt to know you are so well looked after. Is there any one here you would like to be introduced to? There is Paradoski, a most remarkable Pole. He has invented --- But," interrupting herself—"then he only speaks German and Latin besides his own language, and you may not be fluent in either."

"Indeed I am not," said Stasie, laughing.
"Well then, there is Mrs. Daredeville, the celebrated emancipation woman, just returned from America."

"Pray, Lady Elizabeth, allow me to remind Miss Verner of my existence," said Lord Cecil Annesley, extricating himself from a group where he had been entangled.

Stasie was very well pleased to talk with the agreeable, easy-going ci-devant jeune homme, who begged to be presented to Mrs. Harding; and after a little conversation and some inquiries on Lord Cecil's part as to her change of plans, they caught Lady Elizabeth's attention to say adieu. It was a long time before Stasie saw her again.

Miss Stretton had just gone out for a little walk, so the maid who opened the door informed Mrs. Harding when they reached her abode,—and was a

good deal better.

Mrs. Harding, therefore, left her card, and a little note of invitation with which she had provided herself, and drove away home, where Stasie was occupied till dinner in composing a letter to her guardian, which Mr. Harding touched up a little, and then pronounced quite the right thing.

## CHAPTER XV.

SUNDAY was a dull oppressive day, the atmosphere thick with a continuous drizzle, the pavements coated with greasy mud, and the aspect of things in general

depressing.

Miss Stretton arrived a little before luncheon time, wrapped in a waterproof cloak as dingy as the day, her feathers all uncurled, the graceful length of her best dress so brailed up as to reveal india rubber overshoes of surprising magnitude, which covered her boots. Stasie, who had been on the lookout, ran down-stairs to meet and assist her. She conducted her aunt to her own room, and there the unmistakable traces of transit per omnibus on a bad day were effaced, and Miss Stretton enabled to adjust an elegant fabric of lace and rose colored ribbon which adorned her head and softened or hid the ruder touches of time.

"Are you sure, love, that my cap is straight? I am very anxious to produce a good impression on Mr.

Harding, for I can see he is the person to be pro-

pitiated."

"Yes, auntie, it is all right; you look very nice, and we had better go down to the drawing-room. Mr. Harding is sometimes funny and suspicious. He might think I was putting you up to something, or you me."

"You do not say so! Let us go by all means," re-

plied Miss Stretton eagerly.

Stasie was touched by the nervous anxiety of the poor lady. It was evident she had much at stake, and while thus moved, she observed with pleasure that her aunt was a very ladylike, presentable person.

The Harding family were all assembled in the drawing-room, and, to Stasie's confusion, their number was augmented by Kharapet, who was dividing some sweet-meats among the children. He looked ill and shrunken, Stasie thought, and her heart reproached her for the kind of unavowed disgust with which she had thought of his voice and look and gesture whenever she recalled the uncomfortable moment when he had avowed his passion for her. Why should she feel thus towards a man whose only fault was being too fond of her?

Mrs. Harding rose to receive Miss Stretton kindly and graciously. Mr. Harding, who was looking out of the window and grumbling at the weather, turned quickly, and on being introduced by his wife, greeted his guest with his best air of frank bonhommie.

"Very glad to see you, Miss Stretton; this troublesome girl has talked no end about you! You have a bad day. Hope you are none the worse of com-

ing out?"

While Kharapet met her with much empressement, all of which Miss Stretton accepted as gracefully as her nervousness would permit, Stasie, with a degree of composure which belied her inward condition, went straight to Kharapet and bade him good-day.

He bowed low, and took her offered hand in silence, held it loosely for half a second, and spoke a few words in a constrained voice. Then he stood back with a subdued air, which had a double effect on Stasie-it moved her to pity and an inclination to laugh-fatal

combination for a lover's hopes.

Miss Stretton went off into raptures over the children. She was really fond of children theoretically, never having much to do with them, and, being conscious that this tendency was praiseworthy and popular, made the most of it; while the little monkeys, like nearly all creatures who are aware of being courted, were cool, cautious, and distant with their worshiper.

"Come here, you little darling," she exclaimed to Willie; "come and sit down on my lap." She lifted him up, he neither yielding nor resisting, but making himself heavy, after the manner of children whose views

respecting their admirers are undecided.

"He is a poor little chap," said Mr. Harding, more contemptuously than sympathetically. He was a sort of man who thought a delicate child a reproach, and somehow failing in duty to his parents. given his mother no end of trouble."

"And no end of pleasure too," said Mrs. Harding,

stroking his dark curls tenderly.

"Here is a sturdy fellow," continued Mr. Harding, drawing Johnnie forward. "This is my boy."

"And a very fine one, I am sure," cried Miss Stretton with elaborate admiration, though she hugged up Willie at the same time. "He is your living image, Mr. Harding. How old is he, may I ask? Not quite ten! You don't say so! I should certainly have taken him for twelve or thirteen," etc., etc.

While the rest were thus grouped round Miss Stretton, Kharapet found an opportunity to say almost in a

whisper to Stasie—

"Will you forgive my haste and imprudence? I see now I was to blame; will you forget it, and let me be once more your true, your devoted friend?"

"Oh yes, yes!" said Stasie in the same tone; "I should be very glad, for you have been always good to me."

"And it will rest ever a secret between ourselves only?" This with some eagerness.

"Certainly, you may trust me."

"There goes the bell," cried Mr. Harding in a loud and joyous voice. "There is nothing to be done on such a day as this but to eat and drink." He offered his arm to Miss Stretton as he spoke, and Kharapet, after a moment's hesitation, presented his to Mrs. Harding, Stasie and the children bringing up the rear.

Luncheon on Sundays at York Gate was early dinner, at least for all the family save the master, who generally had a small feast by himself at seven o'clock,

So the table was handsomely spread, and Miss Stretton was visibly cheered by the politeness of her host and the sight of the good things before her. She had been warned by her medical adviser to avoid this or that, she said, but on the present happy occasion she would relax the rigidity of her régime and enjoy herself.

Mr. Harding was unusually hospitable and pressing, yet frequent sharp words to the servants and rough rebukes to the children showed his wife and Stasie that all was not serene.

As soon as the meal was over and the children had said grace, Mr. Harding exclaimed, "Now run away, youngsters. I suppose there is nurse or some one at home to look after them?"-this to his wife. "All the servants don't go out on a Sunday, I suppose? It is a preposterous notion this right of servants to go out. By George! we would not stand any such rubbish in the East, eh, Kharapet ?- and you call this a civilized country."

"Poor things! they must want to go and see their friends as much as we do," ejaculated Stasie.
"There, be off with you," continued Mr. Harding to the children, not heeding her.

"Won't you come, Stasie?" said Ethel, pausing beside her.

"Yes, do come with me, Stasie," cried John, taking

hold of her arm.

"Go this moment," cried his father.

And the children ran off.

"Ah," said Mr. Harding, exultingly, "the young scamp knows a pretty girl when he sees one already. Now then, take a little more claret-cup, Miss Stretton, and let us talk over matters. I dare say Stasie has told you my idea—"

"No," interrupted Stasie. "I have not seen my aunt

since you told me."

"Ah, well then Miss Verner has wisely given up her whim about traveling on the Continent as you cannot go with her, and I propose that you should set up housekeeping together, and I will let you one of my houses at Sefton Park for four or five months," etc., etc., etc.

And Mr. Harding went fully into the scheme, Miss Stretton coming in, in the treble, with ejaculations of "I am sure nothing could be better," "most admirable!" "so far as I am concerned, I perfectly approve," and so on, her face lighting up as he proceeded.

Then Stasie expressed her satisfaction; Kharapet, with an air of melancholy acquiescence, stated that he saw no objection; and Mrs. Harding observed how pleased she should be to have Stasie and her aunt for neighbors, at any rate during the summer. All went well. Even the question of finance was got over without great wrangling or difficulty. Mr. Harding proposed that all bills, etc., should be sent in to him for payment. But Stasie, having seen something of the working of his domestic system, stoutly resisted this suggestion, and to her surprise found, though he said little, that Kharapet was on her side. So a temporary arrangement was agreed to. Miss Stretton was to have a monthly sum for housekeeping, and all outgoings, such as wages, rent, etc., were to be paid by the executors.

Having arrived at this amicable conclusion, Mrs. Harding rose from the table and, followed by the rest

of the party, went up-stairs.

So soon as she reached the drawing-room she went to her own little work-table, and took out a small, delicately-embroidered sachet, which she slipped, as she thought, unperceived into Stasie's hand, saying. "A little memento for to-day, Stasie."

"Oh, thank you, dear Mrs. Harding. It is so good of you to have worked it yourself. I did not think it was for me when I saw you doing it, and," opening it, "what a love of a lace cravatte! You really are too

kind. You know how fond I am of lace."

"What's all this?' asked Mr. Harding, attracted by

Stasie's exclamation.

"Not much," returned his wife; "only a trifle I

worked for Stasie as it is her birthday."

"Hey! I never remember these things," said Mr. Harding contemptuously. "All these kind of gifts and ceremonies are bosh, but I wish you many happy returns of the day all the same, Stasie. You haven't a heartier well-wisher than myself," and he shook hands with her. "Why didn't you remind me it was your birthday, and we should have had a bottle of champagne?"

"I really did not think of it myself," said Stasie, smiling; "and I am sure I have your good wishes, which is quite enough without either gifts or cham-

pagne."

"I am so vexed, dearest child, I did not know it was your natal day," exclaimed Miss Stretton, who was established in a luxurious easy-chair, and beaming with delight at the prospect opening before her, "or, poor though I am, I should have brought some small offering of affection."

"It is not at all necessary, dear auntie! Besides,

have you not given me yourself to-day?"

"I have indeed, you dear, sweet thing," exclaimed Miss Stretton much affected.

Mr. Harding, his hands in his trousers' pockets, looked on with an expression of wondering, careless curiosity; and all seemed as serene and sunny as if the summer weather, which ought to have been shining out of doors, had concentrated itself within, when Kharapet, who had kept a little aloof near one of the windows, came forward to introduce (most unconsciously) a charge of dynamite into the amicable group. "I was aware of the occasion," he said gently, "and considering myself, through my late brother, your nearest connection, and by my own choice your sincerest friend, I ventured to bring a little token in remembrance of the day." He drew from an inner pocket a small case, and opening it displayed a very handsome ring of large opals and small diamonds.

Stasie flushed up to the roots of her hair. She was infinitely annoyed; she saw at a glance that it was impossible to refuse, nor did she recognize anything but renunciation of his former pretensions in the little speech with which he had presented his gift. Yet she did not want to be encumbered with any obligation; there was something instinctively antagonistic to him in her impulses,—on the crest of every wave of thought that stirred her brain. Ever since she began to perceive the true nature of his feeling towards her, she had been constantly compelled to run through a little chain of reasoning before she could bring herself into an amiable state of mind towards him. Still it was impossible to refuse, and if she accepted, she must accept graciously. She therefore constrained herself to take the ring with a smile and a few kindly words; but she quickly put it on her finger herself to avoid the giver's touch. Still flushed and uncomfortable, she tried to hide her embarrassment by showing it to Mrs. Harding and Aunt Clem. The latter broke into admiring exclamations, and Mr. Harding, thinking to himself, "He is bidding high for her, and biding his time!" took out his double eye-glass, which he used on very

critical occasions, to scan the stones. "They are not bad," he said gravely. "Give me the ring, Stasie. Ah!" taking it, "they are set transparent."

"They are the best I could get," said Kharapet with a quick flash of his dark eyes towards his colleague.

"No doubt, no doubt," returned Harding, in a disparaging tone, "but they are not to be compared to the stones in that biggest ring of those that came from Mardin."

"I don't remember," said Kharapet sullenly.

"Let us look at them both together," cried Mr. Harding, still holding the object of his criticism. "Go, like a good girl, Stasie, bring us the other ring!"

Stasie hesitated; the ring was among the things she had pledged for Bob's benefit. She was quite ready to disclose that transaction now that Bob was out of reach; but on this day, when every one was happy and kind she would rather not vex either Mr. Harding or Kharapet; however, she felt she had no choice, and even while these thoughts flashed through her brain, she nerved herself to meet the inevitable. "I am afraid I cannot show it to you. I haven't it at present," she said.

A blank expression of utter surprise changed Mr. Harding's self-satisfied aspect.

Kharapet raised his head with a look of keen, almost

fierce, expectation.

"Why, what the devil have you done with it?" exclaimed the former.

"It is my own! I suppose I may do what I like

with it," she replied, roused by his tone.

"No! you may not! You are under age; you are

under tutelage, an infant in the eye of the law."

"The box, Stasie!" said Kharapet in a deep tragic whisper of concentrated feeling. "The box; bring down the box."

Stasie turned, paused, looked at him, then with a slight scornful laugh, exclaimed, "One might think a life was at stake," and left the room.

"I don't like this at all," said Mr. Harding angrily.
"That girl has been up to some blank, blank mischief.
Do you know any thing about it?" to his wife with
fierce emphasis.

"Nothing whatever," she returned, growing a little pale. "But I am sure you will find nothing wrong;

Stasie is incapable——'

"Don't tell me," interrupted Harding, "you'd swear black was white for each other; there will be no getting at the truth between you both, with your ridiculous friendship! and you, ma'am," pouncing on Miss Stretton with a suddenness that made her jump, "what do you know about this business?"

"Nothing, I give you my solemn word," cried poor Aunt Clem, appalled. "And, like Mrs. Harding, I

have every confidence in my dear niece."

"I have no confidence in any girl living," growled

Harding.

Kharapet said nothing, but stared fixedly at the door

by which Stasie had gone out.

"I'll get to the bottom of this, by George!" cried Mr. Harding. "I foresee that girl will give us a heap of trouble. She is—"

What, did not appear, for at that moment Jane, the accomplished parlor-maid, threw the door wide open, and announced in her clearest accents, "Dr. Brooke."

Whereupon enter the visitor, cool, collected, well dressed, and perfectly unconscious of the whirlpool of anger, suspicion and fear into which he was launching himself.

Mrs. Harding stood up to receive him with the sense of relief and protection his presence always brought.

Mr. Harding was too pre-occupied to give him more than a gruff greeting. Kharapet's smooth civility was not to be ruffled by any ordinary test, and Miss Stretton, by an effort, assumed her usual air of well-bred attention.

Brooke himself was immediately aware that there was a storm brewing, and felt curious, but determined

to stay on if possible, in case he might be of use to his cousin.

"Miserable day," said he, drawing a chair near Mrs. Harding; "I felt pretty sure to find you at home. How are the children?"

He looked at her as he spoke, and saw that she was anxious, or in some way disturbed.

"They are all well," she returned.

Her further speech was cut short by the entrance of Stasie, her jewel-box under her arm, and a look of resolution in her face. The sight of the new arrival, however, checked and chilled her. She did not want Brooke as a witness of the quarrel she felt imminent, yet she knew not how to escape it.

While she paused he came forward to greet her, with what, in her own mind she termed his new manner.

"That's right," cried Mr. Harding, reassured for a moment by her speedy return. "You have got them all there."

"I have the box, and you can look at it," said Stasie, standing at bay.

"What is the matter?" asked Brooke in an under-

tone

"I scarcely know," returned Mrs. Harding; "I believe Stasie has given away one of her rings, and they are angry."

"Ought I to go?"

"No, no," she whispered; "don't go."

Meantime Mr. Harding, with some little difficulty, had put the clumsy key into the lock and opened the case; for an instant he was silent, and then uttered an exclamation of dismay. "Look here, Kharapet. Here's

a pretty business."

Kharapet came swiftly to his side and saw the top tray empty of all but the white wool in which the jewels used to nestle; over this lay scattered several small oblong cards of different colors, with names and addresses and also numbers, etc. Kharapet, gazing with dilated, horrified eyes, stood silent.

"Where," exclaimed Mr. Harding, who seemed for the moment paralyzed, "where are they?" A pause. Stasie, gathering up her forces, did not reply, but looked straight and rather defiantly at both executors. "Where," repeated Mr. Harding, collecting himself, "what have you done with the things that were here? and, good God!" lifting the first tray, "there isn't a thing left but two brooches, a clasp, and the gold set. What the deuce have you done with them? and these pawn tickets—why, what the devil, there is something d—d disgraceful and mysterious under this! I'll get to the bottom of it!"

Kharapet said nothing. He sought with eager trembling fingers through the cotton wool; his earnest, alarmed look would have seemed almost ludicrous to Stasie had she not been so horribly mortified by the presence of Dr. Brooke. It could not be avoided, so she rushed to the encounter without giving herself time

to think.

"There will be no difficulty in getting to the bottom of it," she said coolly, though she felt her mouth dry; "I am going to tell you the whole story." She sat down as she spoke on the sofa, near which she stood, and went on, her eyes fixed unflinchingly on Mr. Harding. "You know how you and Hormuz refused me, when I begged for some money to give Mrs. Mathews. No, not to give her—to repay her; for she has never been half paid for all her care of me—all she provided for me!"

"By George, I see it all," cried Mr. Harding, who

was getting very angry.

"No, you do not, returned Stasie. "Just listen. A week after—I think it was a week—Bob Mathews came to see me, don't you remember?" turning suddenly to Brooke—she felt an odd desire to drag him in, to transform him from a judicial spectator to an actor in the scene—"you were here when he came?"

"Yes, I remember," he replied, drawing his chair a

little forward.

"He told me he was in great trouble. I did not mind at first, for he generally is in trouble. However, he went on and described how he had an appointment as surgeon on board a ship going ever so far off, but he had debts, and his creditors would stop him and put him in prison. Now I knew this would be ruin to him, and just throw him on his mother's hands altogether. I saw he was in earnest, and I was at my wits' end to help him. But there was no use in asking you; and as he wanted forty pounds I could not take it out of my allowance, so I thought of the jewels, but I told Bob I did not like to sell them. Then he said I need not, for there were people that would lend money for them, and give them back when you paid it."

Kharapet groaned audibly, and cried in a piteous voice, "When you pay it, and twenty per cent. be-

sides.

Stasie gave him a quick glance and went on. "I was very glad to hear it, and I took nearly all, as you see, and went to meet Bob. We went into several places in the Strand, and got the money he wanted and a little more. Coming out of the last, we ran against Dr. Brooke-

you remember, don't you?—and that's all."
"All!" cried Mr. Harding, "and quite enough. Don't you see what a blank blank piece of folly and imprudence you have been guilty of! a downright disreputable action, by George! Stealing away with your jewels, like a—like a—common thief, to give them to a sneaking scamp of a rascally medical student, who has, I suppose, bamboozled you into promising to marry him! I never heard of a more shamefully deceitful trick. I'll lock you up, by ——. I'll report you to your guardian. I'll ——"

"How dare you talk such nonsense?" interrupted Stasie, starting up, and roused to the wildest indignation. "Promise to marry Bob Mathews! a poor fellow who has not the strength to keep himself straight; who lets himself down to beg help of me! who cannot even dress nicely. You little know me, Mr. Harding.

I helped him out of pity, because he was his mother's son, and I believe he will do well yet; but to think that I could be in love with a boy that is like a tiresome brother!" She broke off and laughed scornfully.

Kharapet had paused in his examination of the box, and stood slightly bent with the pawntickets in one hand, his face lividly, greenly pale, gazing intently at Stasie, but as she spoke, his countenance relaxed.

"That's right; brazen it out-brazen it out," exclaimed Mr. Harding, not a little startled and checked by Stasie's spirit; for like most tyrants he had a strain of cowardice under his bluster. "But you'll not throw dust in my eyes. Now I must insist on your giving me this young man's address. You may as well, for a detective will soon discover him."

"I will give you his address with pleasure," returned "Robert Mathews, surgeon on board the Queen of the Isles, now on her voyage to Shanghai."

"By George! He is off there?" Mr. Harding stopped, as if under the influence of feelings too deep for words, and Kharapet's voice filled up the pause, adding up in a melancholy undertone, "fifteen, seven ten,—five, twenty, five ten—fifty-three—"

"It is as bold and—and disreputable a—a—dodge as ever I heard of," said Mr. Harding, furious at being checked and defied, while he walked up and down-a certain sign of great disturbance—and scarcely able to express himself. "I'll-I'll have that young rascal arrested as soon as the ship is in port, I'll be d-d if I do not. I'll wring the money out of him or his cursed psalm-singing old humbug of a mother."

"You shall not speak of Mrs. Mathews like that," cried Stasie, "or I shall go straight away to my guardian and tell him how you speak to me. He at least

is a gentleman, and would not use such words."

"Don't you see yourself how disgracefully you have acted," resumed Mr. Harding more mildly, and beginning to perceive that he must not go too far. "I appeal to any one if Kharapet and myself have not just cause to be angry, trusting you with property, as we legally had no right to do, and then to see it flung in

the gutter, as one might say."
"Why, what have I done?" asked Stasie. "Taken my own things and lent them to a friend. I haven't robbed you! Do you think I have been so wrong and shameful?" turning to Mrs. Harding; then a thought suddenly struck her, for she went on quickly, "Yes, yes, you are strict; you will be vexed with me, that is the reason I did not say any thing about it to you. But you, Aunt Clem, do you think me so very base and bad?"

It was a crucial moment for Miss Stretton. She was really frightened by Mr. Harding, but her sympathy and affection went with Stasie. And Aunt Clem had a heart, though a good deal frayed out, and she let

herself be moved by its promptings.
"Indeed I do not, Stasie," she said. "You were imprudent, my dear; you should have taken counsel with your kind friend Mr. Harding, and he would have perhaps yielded to your persuasion, or with me, and I should never have allowed you to go alone to the Strand with this objectionable young man; but I love you all the more for your generous thoughtlessness. Pray allow me to be a mediator," she continued, with her best air to Mr. Harding. "I am sure our dear Stasie has no better friends than yourself and Mr. Kharapet; only to men of your intellect and business habits these little feminine weaknesses must seem silly indeed "—an ingratiating simper." Silliness is no word for it," said Mr. Harding, still

walking up and down, and frowning portentously.

Stasie gave her aunt a nod and smile, and feeling a terrible tendency to burst out crying, put on a braver front. "Yes," she cried, "I know they are very good to me, and I shall forgive Mr. Harding his rude words; but if any of you think I am sorry for what I have done you are quite mistaken."

"There is a speech for you," cried Mr. Harding, stopping short. "How are we to trust you with any thing when you make such a—a statement. Gad! You will never be safe out of our sight. I shall retract my consent to your residing with Miss Stretton, there! She would let you blow your brains out if you fancied it. I'll—"

"Do not be hasty," interrupted Kharapet. "Do not be hasty, my good friend. I am sure Stasie will on reflection regret the pain she has given us;" he sighed, as if from the bottom of his heart; "but do

not be too severe. We must try-"

"By George! you are going in for it," interrupted Mr. Harding with a sneer. "But I will appeal to any one," he looked fiercely at his wife, who kept profound silence, though her color varied, "if there ever was a more audacious, disgraceful trick played. I ask you, Dr. Brooke."

"Pray don't," cried Stasie haughtily. "It is too bad to have offended a stranger with such a scene, and as he is not concerned in it in any way, why trouble

him for an opinion?"

"Oh, I have had enough of fine speeches and balderdash," said Mr. Harding with brutal sulkiness. "I'll go off to Williams: it's such a blank nasty day I dare say he will be at home, and see what's best to be done;" so saying he took a bunch of keys from his trouser's pocket with one hand, and seized on the jewel-box with the other.

Stasie did not make the slightest resistance. She gave one steady stare of intense disdain, then, in tones that faltered in the last words, said: "Very well, take it, and this day three years I will claim it, and the last fraction that belongs to me." She turned away and walked towards the door.

Dr. Brooke started up and opened it for her, distancing Kharapet, who made for the same goal, saying in a half whisper, "I will go with him, Stasie; I will restrain him."

Brooke held out his hand, "Good-by, Miss Verner," he said. "I hope to have the pleasure of seeing you on my return." But Stasie did not reply. She gave him her hand for an instant, not daring to trust

her voice, and ran away to her room.

A moment's dead silence ensued; then Mr. Harding exclaimed, "The care of such a girl is enough to turn a saint into a devil. By George! I wish we had some Eastern customs in force here. I will bid you good morning, doctor;" to his wife roughly, "See you don't encourage any of this pernicious rubbish. Let that obstinate minx mope if she likes."

Here Miss Stretton rose and very quietly left the room. Mr. Harding looked after her grimly, and then

with a nod to Brooke went out.

"One moment," exclaimed Kharapet. "I will come with you." He made hasty but ceremonious adieux to Mrs. Harding and Brooke, and walked swiftly away, closing the door after him.

## CHAPTER XVI.

When Brooke, who had observed this scene with deep interest and vivid curiosity, was left alone with his cousin, he was surprised to see her cover her eyes with one hand, while her lips quivered as though she were struggling with strong emotion. Before he could frame a question as to her mood, however, she looked up, and he saw that the tears hung on her lashes.

"I am such a shameful coward," she said, in an un-

"I am such a shameful coward," she said, in an unsteady voice. "You cannot think how degraded I

feel in my own eyes."

"Why?" asked Brooke, drawing his chair nearer to her. "I am not aware that you have done any thing heinous."

"No; that is just it. I have been false and cow-

ardly by my silence. Did you not perceive how Stasie appealed to me, and then with generous tact released me from the necessity of a reply? She knows, Jim—none so well—the truth of my weakness, of my circumstances, and she spared me."

"My dear Livy, you surely exaggerate. There is nothing false about *you*. You mean you did not like to contradict Harding. You were right on the whole

-it is ill talking with an angry man."

"Perhaps; and I should have done Stasie little or no good. Nevertheless, I was false to her!—it is always better to speak the truth; and she is so brave herself she will despise me; yet she will not change, even though she cannot respect me."

"Don't take matters so seriously," said Brooke.

"Miss Verner must not measure every one by herself.

She has an unusual amount of pluck and——"

"She has no one to fear," put in Mrs. Harding.

"I hope you are free from so unpleasant an incubus?"

"I am never free from fear," exclaimed Mrs. Harding, who was evidently excited and off her guard. "You are too observant, too keen, not to have seen it, but you cannot know all the degradation of such a state. You heard how roughly, how brutally Mr. Harding spoke to Stasie. You see how innocent of all evil, how natural and generous her conduct has been throughout. It was my duty to have restrained him, to have defended her, and yet I dared not. When she turned to me I could not, dared not, speak, and she understood it. Did you see how quickly she released me from the 'question' which was indeed the rack to me. Why, even poor Miss Stretton, whom I somehow look upon as weaker and sillier than myself, she stood by Stasie better than I did;" and Mrs. Harding's tremulous hands played nervously with the fringe of the arm-chair in which she sat.

Brooke looked at her with infinite grave sympathy. "Harding was rough—indeed I might use a stronger

word. Perhaps, Livy, if you had had courage enough to hold your own, to face him, it would be better for

him as well as for yourself."

"Of course it would," she returned, resting her cheek on her hand. "But how was I to know that? When I married I never dreamed of a possible struggle with my husband. I only thought of making him happy, of pleasing—or if we differed, to speak gently and reasonably to win him, to persuade; and so I lost my chance. Had I been a woman of stronger, coarser fiber, it would have been better for me, better far for him. Now he has brought me down. I am under his feet. I would do any meanness for peace, I dread him so. Yet it is not so miserable as it was—there is nothing more to know, nothing more to discover. I lost all force and all hope in losing self-respect; and were I burning with indignation, quivering under the cruel, cutting speeches he makes, I yet could not, dare not, show it, he is so strong and so unscrupulous;" she shuddered.

"Good heavens!" cried Brooke. "I guessed a good deal, but nothing like this. What is to be done? Can you find no pretext for separating from him?"

Mrs. Harding laughed a low mocking laugh. "Mr. Harding is an irreproachable husband in the eye of the law. He gives me a good house to live in, clothes to wear, plenty to eat. He is on the whole an affectionate father, except when very angry; he occasionally tells me I am a fool, and a weak treacherous idiot, and a worthless weight, who does not contribute a sixpence to the housekeeping—all this, with many expressions I could hardly repeat; but, he does not beat me, he does not deprive me of the necessaries of life, he does not put me out of doors, and I am powerless: no one can give me any redress."

"Ah, Livy," cried Brooke, carried away by his deep compassion, and feeling that she was too absorbed in her own sorrows to be conscious of the smallest revival of old tenderness, "I wish it had been my good fortune to have married you! I am no pattern man, but I should never have grieved you, and you do not know how fond I was of you. Is there nothing I can do to help you? Might I not, if I chance to hear him speak brutally to you, warn him that I consider myself

as an elder brother, and bound to protect you!"

"You would do me infinite harm," returned Mrs. Harding quietly. "The interference of any man not really a brother would be liable to all kinds of misinterpretation. You have no rights, and you would produce no effect. You can help me most by keeping on good terms with Mr. Harding. You are in a certain degree a successful man, and I see he likes to stand well with you. He has a great regard for appearances out of doors, though he does not heed them at home. Do not let him see that you think him brutal, and he will restrain himself in your presence at least; that is all you can do for me."

Mrs. Harding had recovered herself as she spoke, but there was profound hopelessness in her voice and eyes.

Brooke was greatly moved; he started up and walked to and fro once, then, returning to his seat, he exclaimed—

"You say you have no courage, Livy! It must be no common fortitude that enables you to face such a future. Good God! it is a living death! How can

you support it?"

"I have still a hope—still something to live for, to endure for. I have my children. There is the real bond! I cannot and would not break away from my husband, for even if I could prove any legal justification, I could not take them all with me, and I should destroy the home. I could stand martyrdom a hundredfold more detestable rather than do the smallest act that would injure the children. No! my sole care is to keep the home as decent, as happy as I can for them, and to do that needs all my strength, my self-control, my courage, if I had any; but I think as the children's needs increase it will revive! God will give it me!"

She stopped an instant, and Brooke muttered something which was not a blessing. "My little Willie," resumed Mrs. Harding, with unspeakable tenderness in her voice and eyes, "is a delicate, timid child; he is no favorite with his father, and he fears him terribly. The poor little fellow's whole love and trust is in me, and I tell you, Jim, that I will not die, or yield to any misery, until I see that child old enough and strong enough to take care of himself."

"I can understand that," said Brooke.

"Ethel is a favorite, and Johnnie especially; that boy's likeness to his father distresses me. There is a vulgarity of nature about him, too, that vexes me; but he is not without feeling, and I will develop it. There, Jim, I have opened my heart to you, and it is an infinite relief. You are safe! there is no one else I could speak to. I, too, was very fond of you. I can say it now, when all is past and gone!"

"I would not say so too often if I were you," returned Brooke kindly. "You are a very charming little woman, Livy, and I might like to hear it too

much."

She looked up to him with a sweet, amused smile. "No, I have no fears of that sort, Jim! Mr. Harding put you quite out of my head. Do you know, I was really fond of him when I first married, he seemed so frank and free and fond of me. It was the finding him out that made the agony of our first years—that crushed me in the dust. I really suffer less now, but I do not *love* him!" She paused; a peculiar smile curled her lip, and glittered in her eyes.

Brooke watched her keenly. "No, I do not love him," she repeated thoughtfully. "Nor do I hate him now. I would not do him the smallest harm; but, if he were to die! I do not think I could contain my joy! think of it, Jim! my children, all my own! to train as I believe to be best, to make their home

lovely and refined, to be free!!"

"To be happy, with some one who loved you

truly?" asked Brooke, curious to see what was the bent of her mind.

"I should want no love but the children's. No man should ever come between us. I could not support the idea of marriage; it has been to me the most utter degradation. I could have loved you well, Jim. I remember the time when your coming made my heart beat! Now, you are a dear pleasant friend, but as nothing to me compared to my children. See, talking of my possible love for you does not quicken my pulse by one throb." She stretched out her hand to him.

He took and held it closely in both his. "Yes," he said, "it is steady enough! Well, my sweet cousin, I lost what might have been the crown of my life when circumstances forbade our being united, but I will be your true friend. You will let me know whenever I can help you. I trust in God your children will repay you, but try and pluck up heart to put Harding down for their sakes. I am certain you could! It wrings my heart, Livy, to feel I can do so little for you, and you know there isn't much I would shrink from for your sake." He kissed the hand he held as he spoke

with warm, yet brotherly affection.

But while he was thus absorbed in his cousin's griefs and his own feelings, the door of the back drawingroom opened noiselessly, after the fashion of well-conducted doors, and Miss Stretton came in a few paces, -far enough to hear his last words,-to see him kiss the hand he held fervently. It was but a moment. Aunt Clem immediately retreated unperceived. She was only too happy to escape. She was by no means an intentional maker of mischief or a deliberate thinker of evil thoughts, and just then her sympathies were strongly on Mrs. Harding's side, who had always been kindly and courteous, and was distinctly in favor of establishing her with Stasie. Yet she was a little startled, and made a solemn resolution to hold her tongue. Then she reopened the door with a discreet amount of noise.

"Oh! I beg your pardon, Mrs. Harding. I just came to see if you were alone. I want that dear child to come down-stairs, and she does not like to meet—a—Mr. Harding—or a——" she stopped.

"Well, I shall say good morning," said Dr. Brooke,

"I have paid you an unconscionable visit."

"I fancy Stasie was horribly vexed at your being present," said Mrs. Harding, rising to bid him

good-by.

"She need not have been! I think she turned the executors' flank cleverly; but it certainly was not pleasant to be spoken to so roughly before witnesses. I suppose, Mrs. Harding, you will be at Sefton Park when I return?"

"Yes; you will come and see us, will you not?"
"Without fail! Good-by. Good morning, Miss
Stretton." And he was gone.

Sefton Park, the scene of Mr. Harding's speculation

in land, was some twenty miles from town on one of the many lines diverging from the Waterloo Terminus.

It was a well-situated, well-wooded tract, rising up from the little local railway station to a ridge, at the top of which stood Sefton House, as the old original farm-dwelling purchased by Mr. Harding was called. From this the ground sloped away suddenly, giving a fine view over a richly-cultivated and wooded country. A little below the old-fashioned house of mingled timber and brick which the Harding family occupied in the summer, was a triangular space shaded by a couple of grand old elms; this was partly occupied by the iron edifice which so offended the taste of the Rev. St. John Robinson, and nearly opposite this, at the other side of the road from Sefton House, was a neat villa in the suburban Tudor style.

A bow window at one side looked out on a large field and a fine group of beech-trees, behind which the sunset spread a gloriously-tinted background on fine evenings. At the opposite end of the house a sort of tower, which contained the staircase, diversified the outline; a tolerably large dining-room to the back commanded a vegetable garden; the kitchen lurked behind the tower, and in front stretched a pretty pleasure-ground with flower-beds, further adorned with a few chestnut-trees, limes, and elms, the remains of an old plantation which had been cleared to make way for the "house and grounds of Limeville," as the stately language of Mr. Harding's advertisements described the tenement destined for Stasie's occupation.

Lower down and nearer the railway station were a variety of residences finished, in progress, and just begun—some small and picturesque in the "cottage orné" style, some huge red brick staring edifices, like London houses escaped from square or street, towering over their neighbors in hideous disproportion—bare and brazen, like big bullies. Moreover, in that portion of the park where one of the more ambitious shareholders had erected a couple of these "mansions," there had been no woods, from which to cull some of the leafy nobles to confer grace and beauty on the intrusive cits, who paraded their unblushing

ugliness among the fair fields.

One of these untempting abodes, which did not let readily, was assigned to the Rev. St. John Robinson. The little man lived in a corner of it, waited upon and dominated by an elderly female of stern aspect, who had been selected for him by his aunt, who was the wife of Mr. Williams, solicitor to the estate. He had, in the enthusiasm of his first arrival, planted some roots of ivy along his ruddy front wall, but the owner objected to that parasite, as calculated to loosen the brick-work, and create damp. The ivy, depressed, perhaps, by this sentence, showed no vitality, and the Rev. St. John gave up the struggle. He had, however, an inscription painted on his gate post in red and dark blue old English characters, "St. Monica's Parsonage,"

which was a sort of promise that in time a real church and parsonage should beautify and elevate the neighborhood.

With the usual variety of British climate, the damp, oppressive Sunday had been succeeded by a bright, sunny, warm morning; and Stasie, recovered from the agitation and anger of the day before, prepared to ac-

company Mrs. Harding to Sefton Park.

Mr. Harding had remained to dine with his confidential man of business, and did not return till after Stasie had gone to bed. His mood was less furiously angry than his wife expected, and he did not use absolutely bad language respecting her carelessness, indif-

ference and stupidity as regarded Stasie.

At breakfast next morning he tried to turn the subject into a kind of joke, as if Stasie had been the only excited and abusive individual, but she would not let it pass. When he asked with meaning how she had slept, and hoped she had not had bad dreams after flying at her best friends like a tiger cat, she replied that she was equally anxious to know how he felt after exciting himself to so unpleasant a pitch as to draw forth the attack she had made.

Mr. Harding turned off this thrust by a laugh, and then with his frankest, kindest air, exclaimed, "Come now, Stasie, don't let us quarrel! You know you were enough to vex a saint. You forget, my dear girl, that Kharapet and myself have to account for every farthing and every bit of property that belongs to you, and apart from the interest we both feel in your affairs, it is a very serious thing to find you done out of fifty or sixty pounds! However, Kharapet has volunteered to release the trinkets, and says he will be quite content to receive the actual cash out of pocket without charging interest, which I must say is handsome!"

"Is it?" said Stasie indifferently. "I am very much

obliged to him."

"And," continued Mr. Harding, "if you will give me a solemn promise not to part with them for any purpose I will restore you the box and all that remains

"I shall give no promise, and I do not want the box or its contents," said Stasie grandly, "at least until I can claim it by right. I care very little for jewels, and

I detest obligations."

"Hoity toity!" cried Mr. Harding, a little surprised. "Well, you'll think better of it; anyhow let bygones be bygones, and be off, all of you, to see the house. I find I have to go to Manchester and Liverpool in about ten days, and I'd like to fix about the furnishing and all that before I go. You'll be better and safer out of London away from the pawnshops; and, by George! I believe that aunt of yours is a capital old woman. She and Kharapet seem to have hit it off first-rate!"

With these overtures Stasie thought it wiser to close, which she did the more readily, feeling that she had

by no means had the worst of it.

A messenger was accordingly dispatched to Aunt Clem, who had departed in great uncertainty the previous afternoon, begging her to meet Mrs. Harding and Stasie at the Waterloo Station; and the whole party (for the three children and head nurse were permitted to join) started in high good-humor on their

visit of inspection.

It was a very successful day. Stasie was agreeably surprised by the beauty of the view, and the pleasant situation of the villa offered to her, as it was quite out of sight and hearing of the houses lower down. It amused her to ramble all over the place guided by the children, and plan all sorts of country recreations; she thought that a summer and autumn might pass very pleasantly at Limeville, and went through the rooms with Aunt Clem, who was radiant, appropriating and distributing them, forming great schemes respecting the garden, and splendid projects as regarded future hospitalities.

Finally the gardener's wife, who had charge of

Sefton House, gave them a delightful countrified lunch. Ham and eggs, curds and cream, raspberries and currants—strawberries were nearly over; and Mrs. Harding made all arrangements for coming down the follow-

ing week.

It was hard to drag the children away; to them Sefton Park was paradise. But at length, after being lost in the copse at the far end of the park, chased out of the cow-house, and routed from the poultry-yard, Mrs. Harding was able to muster her forces at the little station, where the bowing, obsequious station-master delayed the seven-o'clock train one or two minutes to permit the important visitors time to take their places.

"I hope you are not very tired, Aunt Clem?" thus

spoke Stasie as they reached Waterloo.

"My dear child, I am too happy to be tired! The idea of a few tranquil months in that sweet spot with you to cheer me, gives new life and strength to this weary frame."

"Yes, I think it will be very nice; but you must have a cab, auntie. Yes, I insist upon it; there, let me

help you in."

## CHAPTER XVII.

AFTER some correspondence and considerable wrangling, all preliminary arrangements for setting up Stasie's ménage were at last made—Mr. Harding undertaking to pay a fair rent to himself; how much, Stasie never asked.

Mr. and Lady Elizabeth Wyatt were duly consulted, and expressed complete satisfaction. They were in fact so anxious to clear up all business prior to their tour of examination in Montenegro, that they were ready to accept almost any proposition.

All through these disputes and *pourparlers* Kharapet had been invariably on Stasie and Miss Stretton's

side; he had been also scrupulously undemonstrative, very quiet, and slightly pensive. Indeed, his sole occupation seemed to be to fetch and carry for Miss Stretton and her niece.

Stasie felt quite angry with herself for wishing so heartily that he would go away somewhere even for a few months, though she felt quite sure that he had

given up his ridiculous fancies about herself.

In the midst of their preparations came a pressing invitation from Ella Mathews. She did not feel, she wrote, as if she could be married without Stasie. Mother and every one wished for Stasie. It was not a long journey, and they would not keep her more than a week.

Stasie at once declared her intention of accepting,

and to her surprise met with no opposition.

It was a very happy visit. The wedding was as simple and homely as it could well be, yet it was full

of the promise of true and deep happiness.

The bride and bridegroom had known and loved each other long and well, they were so ready to go hand in hand through rough and smooth, so kind and considerate for those they were leaving, so grateful for the sudden stroke of good fortune which permitted their union considerably before they had dared to hope for it, that none could fear for their future.

Stasie was delighted to be with Mrs. Mathews, and help her to organize her house, which required much "seeing to," as that good woman expressed it, for she expected to begin the September term with four boarders—an exhilarating prospect—as she calculated on

large benefits to accrue therefrom.

The return to the familiar ways, the homely occupations, the family interests she had been used to in her childish days, had a soothing, healthy influence on Stasie after the excitement and contradiction of her life at Mrs. Harding's, yet she did not look forward with the less satisfaction to a home with Miss Stretton.

C—— was too far away from London and its advanta-

ges to make it a desirable abode, and though quite content for the present to stay in England, she had not in the least given up the idea of foreign travel.

Mrs. Mathews parted from her former protegée with unfeigned regret. She had been so helpful and cheery—so sympathetic and generally "improved," Mrs.

Mathews thought.

"School has done you a world of good, my dear," she said; "you don't seem to go into tantrums now! You were such a peppery little creature when you came first. How you and Bob used to fight, poor fellow? every one was down on him, but I always knew he would come right; and now he has got a good appointment And do you know, that just before we came away he insisted on giving me the ten pounds I paid to get my ring out! You remember that unfortunate business? Where he got the ten pounds I don't know; perhaps some of his pay was advanced to him -anyhow, it was the sweetest bit of money ever I had."

"I am sure it was," said Stasie heartily; "and I believe too that Bob will astonish us all yet. I am sure he is clever, if he will only be steady."

This was just as she was leaving. Many hearty hugs and promises on the part of Mrs. Mathews to pay her dear Stasie a visit whenever she could be spared from home ensued, and assurances from Janet, now the eldest girl at home, that at any rate she would come and see Stasie in her own house, which seemed rather a good joke. So Stasie bade them very heartily farewell and sped Londonwards one fine afternoon at the end of July, feeling for the first time since she had left the shelter of Mrs. Mathews' roof that she was going home.

With Aunt Clem she would be pretty well her own mistress, and yet could make her chaperon happy. She could practice to her heart's content without worrying any one, and if she was out of the way of good lessons, it would not be for long. Besides, the present was holiday time all over the world. Then she would have a subscription at Mudie's, and read quantities of

interesting books, not all novels.

Her quarrel and reconciliation with Mr. Harding, her success in establishing herself with Aunt Clem, had put Dr. Brooke out of her head for the present; yet that Sunday, when she had left the drawing-room in a towering rage, there was something in his tone and gesture that conveyed the impression that he was on her side, but she did not think much of him. If they had not met again, he would have left little trace upon her mind or memory; if—— Oh, most fateful monosyllable!

Meantime Miss Stretton had not for many years, if ever, enjoyed herself so much as at this period. Stasie left all details to her; on her devolved the important business of seeing to the furniture, remonstrating against inferior articles, and protesting against lame sofas and unsteady tables, which she did with all the more firmness because Mr. Harding, to the relief of his family, was absent during this interlude, and left orders with the struggling upholsterer, who did work cheap for the ruling spirit of Sefton Park, to move the household goods from a tenement which had just been let on lease, to the villa occupied by Stasie, and to make good deficiencies.

Then the task of engaging servants was new and delightful so far. Miss Stretton was too inexperienced in household management to anticipate any difficulty in managing them. Through all these labors Mrs. Harding gave valuable assistance; and, having now settled herself at Sefton Park, was on the spot. With her help Miss Stretton secured a nice good-humored-looking housemaid; while "cook" at the "House," as the old dwelling-place was called, recommended a very "respectable young person," a cousin of her own, who only "wanted experience" to be a "cook of high de-

gree;" of course she (Mrs. Harding's chef) could give any hints that the neophyte might require. Miss Stretton hastened to secure this possible treasure. But, alas! it soon proved that the experience which was "only" wanted was about every thing, as in the case of Susan, whom Miss Stretton preferred to call by her surname Barnet, as more genteel, want of experience meant total ignorance; and for some time Stasie and her aunt were forced to feed on scorched mutton, bleeding beef, watery vegetables, bullet-like potatoes, and extraordinary compounds either dried to chips, or swimming in smash, and intended for puddings; while the weekly accounts were of alarming and disproportioned magnitude; but we must not anticipate.

The day Stasie was expected home Mrs. Harding was obliged to go into town, and offered to meet her and convey her home, to Miss Stretton's great relief.

She had sat down to rest after her luncheon or early dinner, thinking how much and how well she had done, for Miss Stretton was one of those not uncommon individuals who are at once timid and conceited.

It was pleasant sitting there in the bay window of the drawing-room. The song of the birds, the perfume of the mignonette, which had considerably overrun the boundaries of its original bed in the neglected pleasure-ground, the regulating of which Stasie reserved for her own inspection, came through the open casement. After regarding the carpet with some pride (she had stood out stoutly for a new one, and gained her point—a fact that raised her in own esteem and disposed her to believe temporarily in herself, as a woman of bold and determined character), Miss Stretton continued to muse sleepily on her own good fortune.

Here she was transplanted, as by an enchanter's wand, from a wretched top-bedroom and fare not too plentiful, to the comfort, the security of this pleasant home—to the dignity of being not only chaperon but aunt and nearest-of-kin to a handsome young heiress,

who was inclined to pet and make much of her only relative. Most firmly did Aunt Clem resolve to make herself useful, agreeable, indispensable to that sweet, dear girl, Stasie, who was strong enough, too, to stand up for herself, and would not let Mr. Harding trample on her as he did on that poor weak creature, his wife. It was altogether a piece of luck beyond hope. Miss Stretton shuddered when she looked back on the varied discomforts and mortifications of her checkered career—its terrible uncertainty, too, or rather its terrible certainty of failing as years robbed her of her activity and efficiency.

Stasie, she thought, would not leave her unprovided for when age and helplessness crept over her. And if she married—well, please God, she would marry that nice, considerate Mr. Kharapet, who was calculated to make any woman happy, and who had as good as promised that he would provide for her (Miss Stretton) if she took his part and helped him to win the woman he so fondly loved, poor fellow! It was quite a pleasure to see a man so heartily and avowedly in love in these

days of hardness and calculation.

With such soothing ideas growing indistinct, Miss Stretton had nearly dropped asleep, when she was roused by the door opening and the servant announcing "A gentleman, ma'am," which was Mary the housemaid's mode of surmounting the difficulty of a name she could not quite catch. Miss Stretton started up and instinctively put her hands to her cap as she turned to meet Kharapet, who advanced with a winning smile. "I am very glad to see you," exclaimed Aunt Clem warmly.

"Thank you, dear madam, thank you," returned Kharapet, taking her offered hand. "I have been looking forward to this pleasure, but did not like to intrude sooner, knowing you would be greatly occupied; but to-day I was anxious to have a little conversa-

tion before your niece returns."

"She is to be back this evening."

"I know, and I trust," accepting the chair drawn forward by Miss Stretton, "I trust you find all things satisfactory? Is your house comfortable? I do not pretend to understand all the needs of delicate English ladies, but if any thing is deficient, let me know, and I think I shall be able to induce Mr. Harding to make it good."

"I am sure I am ever so much obliged to you, Mr. Kharapet. There are a few little things, absolute necessaries, which we really ought to have—a wardrobe for my room. There is but one, and of course that is for Stasie. Then the dining-room door will not fasten, and there is no butler's tray," etc., etc., etc.

Miss Stretton ran on with a string of absolute neces-

saries which considerably surprised Kharapet.

He, however, took out his pocket-book, and gravely made a note of her demands. "Mr. Harding is perhaps a little hard in his dealings," he said. "A man of strict integrity, but severe."

"Well, I am sure his severity does not prevent him from furnishing his own house most luxuriously," said Miss Stretton with some tartness; \* and I suppose my

niece, Miss Verner, pays for what she has?"

"No doubt, dear madam; but it shall be my care

that she gets full value for what she pays."

"Ah!" cried Miss Stretton, as if some new light had broken in upon her. "Well, Mr. Kharapet, I am sure you will do your best for us. I quite identify myself with my dear niece, you see. It is such a comfort to have a friend like yourself! And tell me, are you quite well? I must say you have not seemed so of late."

"I am better!" replied Kharapet with a deep sigh.

"But the constant strain of deferred hope—of doubt—of—of dread—is trying! I had thought of risking an avowal to Stasie some weeks ago." He paused, looking keenly at his interlocutor from under his partly-drooped lids.

"And why didn't you?" exclaimed Miss Stretton

briskly. "I can't think she would have refused

you!"

These words satisfied Kharapet that the good aunt was still ignorant of the true state of the case. She was much too transparent a subject to be capable of

deliberately misleading him.

"You do not understand the nature of my hesitation," said he softly. "At present we are on the happiest terms. She looks on me as a relative—a kind of uncle—and I fear waking her too rudely. In time, away from the excitement of her life in London, I hope to arouse in her sentiments similar to my own. It is to this end I crave your help. We will take time, dear Miss Stretton; we will take time!"

"Oh, as much time as you like!" cried Aunt Clem with a pleasant smile. "I assure you I am in no hurry to quit such comfortable quarters. I am, I think, very disinterested to further your plans as I am ready to

do."

"You are very kind," returned Kharapet emphatically; "but as to disinterestedness, I trust you know that your interests are bound up in mine. I hope you understand that I consider myself bound to take care of you, should the happy day arrive when I can call Stasie my wife."

"It is very good of you to say so," said Miss Stretton, with twinkling eyes; "and I will frankly admit

that I depend upon you."

"You may, dear madam, you may," earnestly,—
"and I depend upon you! I feel as if you were my
best, my only friend! I own to fearing Mrs. Harding's enmity, I know not why, but I fancy Stasie's
coldness and indifference of late are owing to her influence. I own I dread Mrs. Harding's cousin. He
is not a good man!" Kharapet shook his head solemnly. "But he is gone, and his return is uncertain.
I too am going away for a week or ten days. My
noble friend and patron, Lord Saintsbury, has invited
me. I will not intrude on Stasie until she is settled in

her new abode. I leave myself in your hands, my good friend! You will do me what service you can. I do not ask you to speak of me save at intervals, as occasion offers. By and by you may say more. I will suggest—I will suggest." He pressed his palms together, as was usual with him when very earnest.

"Very well! You may leave yourself in my hands, my dear sir; for in seeking to serve you I feel sure I am acting for Stasie's happiness also. I hope you will come and see us directly you return. I am quite sure you will be very welcome to Stasie as well as to myself. Now you must let me offer you some refreshment. I know you do not care for tea, but I think I can give you a tolerably good cup of coffee. If you will excuse me I will go and see to its preparation myself. And, oh! I will give you Stasie's portrait to look at. She was photographed just before we left town."

So saying she placed a cabinet photograph in his

hand and departed.

Kharapet walked slowly into the bay of the window where he had the best light, and gazed long, with burning eyes and a strange, greedy, cruel smile, upon the picture. It was a good and pleasing likeness, the figure in profile, but a turn of the graceful throat bringing the face three-quarters round. There was a frank smile in the eyes, a tender sweetness in the mouth, and yet a look of resolution in the whole face that seemed to Kharapet to convey defiance—defiance to himself especially. How vividly he recalled her peculiar charm of complexion and coloring! His instinct prompted him to seize by force, were it necessary, and hold fast the woman who had roused his passion, whose youth and inexperience, by all the laws of nature and probability, ought to have given her unresistingly to his wishes; and yet there was an indefinable something under all her tenderness, and at times caressing softness, which, in spite of himself, he feared and shrank from. By one and the same impulse he could have clasped her in his arms and loaded her with kisses, while he could have cut her delicate flesh with

the lash for her indifference and daring.

How fiercely and intensely he resolved that nothing should deliver her or her fortune out of his hand. It rested with herself to be his ruler or his slave. His in either case she should be. The strength of his own will calmed him. It was not likely that equal force could be found in any of his possible rivals. Moreover, no one had any stronger claim to influence Stasie than himself: no one took any deep interest in her. That foolish elderly body her aunt who counted for something at the present stage of affairs, notwithstanding her inherent insignificance, was all his own. He felt his growing power over her, and esteemed her accordingly, or rather weighed her in the cruel balance which tests all things by their possible utility to self. His was the nature that bows pliantly, willingly to the strong, but relentlessly crushes whatever is weak, and can no longer be of use. He was still musing over the photograph when the return of Miss Stretton warned him to put on his mask; and as the coffee soon appeared, he fell into soft and amiable conversation with his hostess, which she found most soothing to her taste and self-love, it was so new to her to be a personage of any importance.

Together they discussed the necessity of mixing liberality with prudence. They agreed touching Stasie's unfortunate attachment to the Mathews family, and congratulated each other that they were at a

tolerably safe distance.

"I confess I rather dread their influence," said Miss Stretton, helping her guest to a second large slice of pound cake. "There is no doubt that Mrs. Mathews did her duty by Stasie, and is a good woman—Heaven forbid I should detract from any one's merits!—but when a mother has sons whose fortunes she could further in so agreeable and simple a way, it is not in human nature to—to refrain."

"You are right, you are right," returned Kharapet thoughtfully. "You are profoundly observant, and therefore I ask do you think there was any thing more than—than pity, sisterly feeling in Stasie's extraordinary and imprudent conduct respecting those jewels?" and he raised his large deep eyes to hers with a look that seemed to search her thoughts.

"What a handsome creature he is," thought the imaginative spinster, as she answered with an amiable smile: "Nothing, my dear sir, nothing whatever. You could see she despised that good-for-nothing Bob Mathews; and when a girl, especially a girl like Stasie,

despises any one, it is all over."

"But he is young and she is young, and if he spoke

to her of love, of course she would love him."

"My dear Mr. Kharapet, it would be much more likely that she would box his ears and send him about his business. English girls are not like over-ripe plums, ready to drop into the first hand that touches them;" and Miss Stretton laughed at her own smartness.

A slow cynical smile crept over Kharapet's face.
"Nature," he said, "nature, dear madam, is pretty
much alike in all; but Stasie is slow to weaken."

"By the way, what have you done about those jewels?" asked Miss Stretton with some curiosity.

"The interest will run up frightfully."

"Do you think," cried Kharapet indignantly, "that I should be guilty of such culpable negligence? No. I have redeemed them. I redeemed them immediately."

"Oh, indeed," cried Aunt Clem. "I am sure Stasie

will be pleased to have them again."

"Ah!" returned Kharapet, rubbing his hands slowly together. "You must be aware that I could not give them back without Mr. Harding's consent, and he is suspiciously distrustful; besides he is away, and we must confess it was a startling act."

"It was a natural impulse in a generous young

creature."

"Do you think," asked Kharapet insinuatingly, "you could induce her to give you the remaining trinkets to keep? and you might pass them on to me. It is possible some such generous impulse might seize

her again."

"Not I, indeed," cried Aunt Clem, laughing. "I will not vex my dear niece in such matters, and I think you may make your mind easy; she will never give away what specially belonged to her mother: take my advice, let the matter rest. If she knows you have taken the other things out and not given them back to her she will—well, she will not be pleased."

"But will she not see my care for her interest?"

cried Kharapet.

"She will not care a straw about that," said Miss Stretton; "eight or ten years hence she may, not now; believe me, I know her, and you had better be guided by me. I can give you many hints."

Kharapet looked earnestly at her, "I begin to think

you are right," he said.

Mrs. Harding and Stasie did not reach Sefton Park till seven o'clock, and found nurses and children gathered at the little station to meet them. They were received with much attention by the station-master, with whom, as with most of the employes about the place, Mrs. Harding was a great favorite, while the children hailed Stasie with shouts of welcome.

"This is really like coming home," said Stasie.

"Yes," returned Mrs. Harding, to whose hand Willie was clinging. "It is very nice, that home feeling. You will be pleased to see how well Miss Stretton is looking. She told me as I passed this morning that she preferred waiting to receive you at home, and to have all ready. I wanted you both to have high tea with me, but she thought it better not."

"Thank you, dear," returned Stasie. "I think it is

better I should spend the first evening with my aunt.

I am sure she is very happy, poor thing!"

Here, a short slight man in a very ecclesiasticallooking single-breasted frock coat, who had been speaking to one of the porters, turned round, and, raising his soft felt hat, approached Mrs. Harding. "I am glad to see you back again," he said. "I understood you had gone away for some weeks."

"No, only for a few hours' shopping in town, and to meet my friend Miss Verner. Stasie, let me introduce Mr. Robinson. I have brought an addition to your flock, Mr. Robinson. This lady and her aunt have

taken Limeville."

"I am very happy to hear it," said the Rev. St. John Robinson, with his natural frank courtesy. "We are glad to welcome any addition to our congregation, especially if it be a recruit for the choir. I am in some difficulty, Mrs. Harding; we have lost one of our best voices—Miss Thorne. She has gone away for the

autumn, and is then to be married."

A short conversation on local matters ensued. Then Johnnie asked to drive the cart which had been sent to take Stasie's luggage, and on his receiving permission, Miss Ethel clamored to be taken up also. Willie, however, still clung to his mother, so the elders of the party proceeded to walk up the central road towards Sefton House—Mr. Robinson beside Mrs. Harding, and nurse trying to keep up with the cart, wherein Johnnie stood triumphant like a classic charioteer.

"I believe my old friend Jim Brooke is a connection of yours," said the incumbent breaking away suddenly

from his previous subject.

"You know him?" returned Mrs. Harding in some

surprise.

"Oh yes; we were at school together. He was my patron and protector, and very good to me, though he was a trifle overbearing and pugnacious."

"I could quite imagine that," cried Stasie impulsively, and the next moment was sorry she had spoken,

"Why should you?" said Mrs. Harding. "I have always found him kind and gentle."

"He could scarcely be any thing else with you."

"I am not so sure; boys can often be rough enough to their female relatives, and men too."

"You surely are mistaken," exclaimed Robinson,

evidently shocked.

"I hope so," said Stasie.

"I had a letter from Brooke yesterday," resumed the young clergyman. "He has left his friends at Dieppe, and writes from Geneva; he is going to have a look at some of the German towns. He came home through Italy, you know. I wish he would settle in London; I am sure he would make his mark. He is a very clever fellow."

"I wish he would," echoed Mrs. Harding; "but I think he is fond of the life in India, yet he is ambi-

tious."

"Yes, but to succeed in London requires capital,

especially for a medical man," returned Robinson.

Thus talking, they passed the lower portion of the park and the staring houses before described. Stasie, taking Willie's hand, walked on with some eagerness in front. She was dying to be at home—to be welcomed by Aunt Clem.

As the road ascended, the view towards the Surrey hills widened. The setting sun gleamed in golden glory through the leafy screen to the west, and Stasie

thought it was indeed a delightful place.

"I will let you meet Miss Stretton without me," said Mrs. Harding, pausing at the gate of Limeville. "I think she would very naturally like to have you to herself; perhaps you will both come out for a stroll after tea."

"I will, at any rate," cried Stasie, and with a bow to Robinson, she ran quickly through the garden to the open door, where stood Aunt Clem in a new dress, bristling with flounces, plissés, and dangling ends of ribbon.

Need it be said with what effusive joy she was welcomed-with what pride she was led from room to room-with what eloquence Aunt Clem described the battles she had fought over each superior article of furniture—with what care and caution she insinuated that Mr. Harding, no doubt from the best motives, was just a leetle hard to deal with? Then the servants were presented to their young mistress, who repudiated the title, declaring that she wished it to be applied to her aunt. "I am too young and too ignorant to manage things, auntie, and as you will have all the trouble, you had better have all the authority too. I see you have given me the best and biggest bedroom, with a dressing room too. You ought to have that; I don't want to be made a personage of, only to do pretty well what I like and enjoy myself, as I am sure I shall with you, dear auntie. How nice you have made every thing, and what a heap of trouble you have taken! I think we shall be very happy here for a few months, and then perhaps you will feel well enough to travel. You look, oh! so much better."

"And I feel so, dearest Stasie. I do not doubt that after a month's repose and happiness with you I shall feel quite ten years younger and equal to any thing."

So, with generous kindness, looking forward to make those around her happy, content with the present, though eager for further and higher enjoyment, and not dreaming that clouds could gather over a future so bright and full of promise as her own, Stasie entered on this new phase of her existence.

She soon contrived to fill her days not unprofitably. She applied herself to gardening with enthusiasm, under the guidance of Mrs. Harding's gardener, and she gave what help she could to Mr. Robinson in his choir and school. These avocations, with long walks in Mrs. Harding's company and a subscription to Mudie's, left no time on her hands. Miss Stretton, having once organized the household, did not overexert herself. She found some congenial society

among the residents at Sefton Park—ladies who had enjoyed fewer advantages, and boasted fewer pretensions than herself, and who treated her with a deference equally new and delightful. Thus all went well. Mr. Harding's absence was unusually prolonged, and his wife deeply enjoyed the breathing space thus afforded her to recover her strength for future trial.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

Though amused and interested in the various places he visited, Brooke grew tired of traveling alone, and made his way towards London some five or six weeks

after he had left it.

He had promised to visit a friend of his brother who had made a fortune in the Colonies, and settled in Scotland, where he offered Brooke the inducement of good shooting and a pleasant party. Of course it was necessary to take London en route, and once there it was incumbent on him to see Mrs. Harding and Miss Verner. It was curious how interested he felt respecting the latter,—who was a stranger, and a somewhat hasty self-willed personage. Yet he was anxious to be good friends with her again, and to be on the same footing as before she had outraged his sense of propriety. He was even vexed with himself for having misjudged her, and anxious to see how she would receive him,

It was a fine autumnal evening, and the suburban Park looked to great advantage as he walked leisurely up the hill, having asked his way to Mr. Harding's house.

He noticed as he went along the flaring red brick mansion with the inscription "St. Monica's Parsonage," and thought he would call on his friend Robinson before he returned to town; so thinking, he reached the top of the hill, and saw the low rambling house, its porch covered with honeysuckle, the gable nearest the road sheltered by two huge lime trees, and beyond, at the opposite end, a big brown barn roofed with mellow red tiles, which dwarfed the dwelling-house, and had quite a grand air, owing to its high arched doors, under which a loaded wain could pass. Beyond, again, came a clump of oaks and elms, and from an open space in front of the entrance stretched the leafy avenue before described.

A small lawn or pleasure ground bordered with rose trees, some of which were still in bloom, and studded with beds of geraniums and verbena, lay between the road and the house, across which a straight path led to

the door.

Here Ethel and Willie were playing "Les Graces," and no sooner had they caught sight of Brooke than they threw away hoops and sticks, and ran forward with shouts to met him.

"Oh! Dr. Brooke! you have been away such a long

time."

"I am so glad you have come back! Mamma is writing in the sitting room. Come in, come in."

"We have another pony this summer," cried

Willie.

"And we have a governess, and lessons all the time; isn't it a shame?" exclaimed Ethel.

Brooke greeted them cordially, and each taking a hand, led him to the house, chattering as they

went.

"Mamma, mamma! here is Dr. Brooke," cried Willie, throwing open the door of a long narrow room paneled with oak, and afflicted with a cross light, having a window at each end. A thick Persian carpet and a few attractive easy chairs gave an air of comfort to the homely room. At a center table Mrs. Harding sat writing. She started up with a look of unmistakable pleasure, as the children and their captive entered.

Brooke was glad to see that she looked better and

brighter than when he left her.

"I had no idea you were coming back so soon," she said, after the first words were exchanged. "When

did you arrive?"

"The day before yesterday. No, I have not staid away as long as I intended," and he entered into some description of his wanderings, to which the children listened eagerly, till a dark eyed smart looking little lady in a black dress came in, and, with a pretty courtesy to Mrs. Harding, summoned "ces chers enfants" to their lessons. Ethel and Willie reluctantly obeyed.

"That is a new importation?" said Brooke, who had risen on her entrance, as he resumed his

seat.

"Yes, the children ran too wild here, so I found a French girl to teach them. She is a nice little thing, and useful to me in many ways. Have you had luncheon, Jim?"

"Thank you, yes. Now tell me all your news since that Sunday when I witnessed the scene about the

jewels."

Mrs. Harding smiled and colored a little. "That horrible day!" she said. "However, all's well that ends well. Things came quite right after. Mr. Harding was called out of town on some business, and got over his vexation. Mr. Kharapet behaved amazingly well; he went and released the jewels,—but holds them,—and Stasie is settled quite near us, with Miss Stretton as her companion and chaperon. I think she is very happy and quite busy. We will go and see her presently. It is a wonderful addition to my life having her here. She cheers and interests me."

"So it seems," he returned, looking steadily at her. "I see a great change for the better in you, Livy! I hope, my dear little cousin, that things are easier for you than when we last spoke. I have often thought of

our conversation!"

"So have I, and partly regretted it," exclaimed Mrs. Harding. "But I could not keep back the words, it was such a relief to tell you the misery of my life! But somehow things are better, Jim, or I have more hope, a sort of feeling that the worst is over, that something of courage is growing up in my heart! You may think it a trifle, when I tell you an incident that has revived my soul." She paused.

"Go on," said Brooke.

"About a fortnight ago Johnnie went to a boarding school for the first time. I am ashamed-no, not ashamed, why should I be? I am obliged to say that I looked forward to his absence with a certain sense of relief. The night before he left I was alone with him; he suddenly threw his arms round me, and exclaiming, 'I know I have been a bad naughty boy to you, but I do love you, mother-I do, I do!' he burst into sobs, and hugged me with all his might. Jim, I cannot tell you how his words filled me with joy and hope. The child has a heart, and it is mine! His love for me will be the saving of him, and to me an infinite reward."

A wonderful glow lit up her face, a smile of unspeakable tenderness curved her lips; she was lovely at that moment. Brooke looked at her with deep and warmest sympathy.
"Yes," he said, "the love of a mother like you ought

to be the salvation and the making of any boy. I

never knew any thing like it."

"But you were strong enough to make yourself," exclaimed Mrs. Harding, recovering her composure. "Do you know, I fancy you have more feeling now than you used to have?"

"Perhaps so," replied Brooke thoughtfully; "I imagine it takes knowledge and experience to develop a boy's heart, whereas a girl's is so much more delicately organized that she feels and perceives instinctively where we are impervious; but you don't think me a cold hearted fellow, Livy?"

"No, indeed, I do not; though you are far from soft! I should be so glad to see you happily married, Jim. In spite of my own experience, I believe no life is so happy—as happy married life. Children are such marvelous teachers; no one knows more than one side of existence who has never experienced what it is to be a parent; but you must be prudent and choose well."

Brooke laughed. "If I begin to be deliberate in such a choice, I suspect I shall go wrong," he said. "I look for what my friend Robinson would call 'divine guidance'—that is, impulse, and the mysterious attractions which no philosophy can explain."

"The effects of which are sometimes disastrous," re-

plied Mrs. Harding gravely.

"No; not except with weak blockheads."

"Which, you flatter yourself, you are not?" said Mrs. Harding, laughing. Then they passed to other topics, and spoke of Mrs. Harding's only sister, who was married to a man in the Indian Civil Service, and wrote rarely. Brooke had heard of the husband as a rising man, and Mrs. Harding was interested in her sister's prospects.

At length Brooke said it was time to think of return-

ing to town.

"You need not hurry away, Jim; come with me to see Stasie, and I will walk with you to the station after. You know I never ask *any* one to dinner without first apprising Mr. Harding, though you are rather a favorite with him."

"I regret to say the feeling is *not* mutual," said Brooke, laughing. Mrs. Harding made no reply, but putting up her writing, went into the hall or rather entry, and took her garden hat which hung there. "This is a nice place," said Brooke, as they issued from the house.

"It is. I am fond of it, and always have felt less unhappy here than in London. The air too is pleasant and remarkably healthy." "Tell me," resumed Brooke," how does Kharapet get on? Is he still persevering in his designs on Miss Verner?"

"He has been very persevering and determined hitherto, and has made himself exceedingly useful, nay indispensable, to Miss Stretton, who is not the best manager in the world; but he gains no ground, indeed he loses it. Though Stasie says nothing, I can trace indications of disgust and repulsion which she never showed before. I have an idea that some little time ago he made Stasie a declaration—probably a violent one; for though he has enormous self-control, there is a tiger under the soft fair outside."

"The presumptuous beggar!"cried Brooke, "he is incapable of measuring the distance between Miss Verner and himself; no Eastern could possibly perceive it. I cannot tell you how murderous I feel, when I see that fellow's eyes resting as they do on

your young friend."

"It annoys me too; and, between ourselves, I think

Mr. Harding would rejoice in his discomfiture."

"Why then does he openly countenance his pretensions?" cried Brooke. "It is a serious matter to play fast and loose with so precious a thing as a

woman's whole future."

"It is certainly; but, Jim, no great harm can be done; Stasie will never listen to him; and I think he is giving up himself, for he is going away in a few days to pay a round of visits to some grand country-houses—Lord Saintsbury's among the number. Perhaps he will find some less obdurate heiress than Stasie."

"She has money, has she not?" asked Brooke.

"Yes," said Mrs. Harding, laughing; "I am not sure how much, for both Mr. Harding and Kharapet are very reticent on the subject. Are you interested?"

"Yes. It is a very strong reason for Kharapet's hanging on to her like grim death. I have a great dislike to these Eastern Christians."

"Is not that unjust, Jim? They have been a persecuted race, and surely the religion, they profess must

in some way bring forth fruit."

"I doubt it. It was necessary for Christianity to filter through a Western medium to become what it is. Depend upon it, the early converts, could their dust be reanimated, would be greatly astonished at the outcome of Paul and Peter's preaching."

Mrs. Harding did not answer, and a few moments more brought them to the gate of Limeville, Stasie's new home. The entrance door stood open in country fashion, and Mrs. Harding walked in without cere-

mony.

Crossing a neat little hall, Brooke followed her into the drawing-room, which was sweet with the scent of flowers, and full of mellow light, as the venetian blinds

softened the glare of the evening sun.

Miss Stretton was settled comfortably in an easy chair for the uninterrupted perusal of the *Times*, and rose to receive her visitors with her wonted amiability.

"Where is Stasie?" asked Mrs. Harding.

"She must be in the garden, I think; I have not seen her since dinner. She often goes to read to Janet there."

"I will go and look for her," replied Mrs. Harding.
"I hope she is not gardening in the sun again. Strong as she is, she cannot dispense with ordinary prudence," and she stepped through the open window.

"You seem to have a pleasant abode here," said Brooke. "How does Miss Verner like such re-

tirement?"

"She seems exceedingly happy; indeed she has the sweetest possible nature, and is so easily pleased. Of course, though I say it myself, she finds the warmest sympathy and devotion from me, and, hers is a heart that would pine without such solace. She has her little whims, it's true. There is one of those Mathews

that she fancied was out of health, so she has had her up here, and just lavishes every care upon her—reading improving books, hearing her practice, and all that—exceedingly praiseworthy, but a little tiresome. Yes, the place is charming, and the repose in my weak state of health is most soothing, nor is it monotonous. Our good friend, Mr. Kharapet, is frequently here, and is a most delightful companion. I do not know what we shall do when he goes away. Mr. St. John Robinson, too, is a great addition to our small society, though scarce sufficiently evangelical in his views for me. Altogether we are very happily placed. And so you you have been traveling on the Continent, Dr. Brooke?"

Brooke assented, adding that he found a great charm

in the medieval towns of Southern Germany."

"Ah, yes! I know some of them well. Dresden, and

Berlin, and---

Miss Stretton's further reminiscences were cut short by the return of Mrs. Harding, who was followed by an awkward-looking girl of fourteen or fifteen in a striped cotton dress that showed a pair of gigantic boots. A large would-be ornamental pinafore slipping off one shoulder gave her an air of crookedness, not redeemed by a broad, heavy-looking freckled face and rather coarse red hair. Outside Brooke could hear Stasie's voice saying "Thank you! You have done it very nicely indeed; now you might move these plants nearer the outer paling." An indistinct murmur followed, and then Stasie stepped into the room—Stasie, in a simple lilac print, a black waistband marking out her supple waist, a large garden hat shading her face, and washleather gauntlet gloves defending her hands.

Brooke took in every detail of her figure (he could hardly make out her face), even while bowing at Mrs. Harding's formal words— "Dr. Brooke, Miss Janet Mathews." He was scarcely aware how much he had been haunted by the vision of Stasie—erect, indignant, defiant, as he last saw her, until she thus stood before

him in a mood so different.

"I did not think you would be back so soon," said Stasie almost in Mrs. Harding's words, as she drew off her rather earth-stained glove and gave him a soft, warm, white hand. Some undefined change struck Brooke's vividly-awakened senses; something gentler, milder in her tones; something slower and less alert in her movements, as she walked to the sofa and sat down, removed her hat and placed it beside her, raising her eyes to his with a smile. "I did so envy you when you were going, and now I am very pleased with this place. Still, I hope to make the grand tour myself as soon as Aunt Clem is strong and well. Don't you think she looks better?"

"Very much better," returned Brooke stoutly (he had a very misty recollection of her former aspect).

"But she can hardly fail to get all right here."

There was a slight pause, filled up by Miss Mathews, who exclaimed, "Do you know, Mrs. Harding, that the rector is going to have a school feast, after all! Mr. Robinson was here this morning and told us. We are all to help."

"I am sorry my strength is not equal to the task," said Miss Stretton. "Mr. Robinson knows that my spirit is willing, but—" an expressive hesitation.

Mrs. Harding seemed interested, and while the three engaged in a discussion on the subject, Brooke

approached Stasie.

"So, after all, you did not carry out your plan," he said.
"I put it off of my own free will," she replied. "I could not drag my aunt away when she was unfit to move."

"No, of course not! You seem to have a nice

garden? Will you show it to me?"

"Yes, if you like," frankly; "we have some delightful old trees that make it pretty." She took up her hat again, unnoticed by the others, and stepped through the window. Brooke followed, and they strolled over the mossy grass for a minute or two in silence.

"There is our avenue, of which we Sefton-Parkians are very proud. Then, this is my study on fine days," leading the way to a rustic hexagonal summer-house partly inclosed, which was raised on a green mound, and through the open panels of which a view could be obtained of Mr. Harding's somewhat picturesque residence. "You see the commonplace road and houses are quite invisible from this."

"Yes; it is very well arranged."

"But you cannot think what a state of neglect we found it in," Stasie went on, warming with her subject. "Fortunately the grass was good; it only wanted watching and cutting, and now it is quite velvety."

"How long have you been here?" asked Brooke.

"Nearly two months."

"Do you know," resumed Brooke, after a moment's silence, "I have always wanted to apologize to you for having been present at that uncomfortable scene, when—"

"Yes, I remember," said Stasie, interrupting him as he paused, having thoughtlessly rushed into an awkward subject. "I was vexed about it at the time,one does not like to be scolded roughly before a stranger,—but I don't care now. I gained my point; and," her eyes sparkling with a keen sense of the ridiculous, "do you remember Mr. Kharapet's face of terror and dismay as he felt about among the cottonwool, and found nothing! I don't think the loss of all the trinkets in Europe or Asia would have so moved an Englishman, except, indeed, Mr. Harding."

"Flattering opinion you seem to have of that gentleman! I confess I felt inclined to give him a shake

when I heard him speak as he did."

"They say I ought not to have written to you-I mean about meeting you when I was with poor Bob Mathews—but I cannot see it," returned Stasie re-flectively, and as if to herself. "Did you think it very wrong?"

It was unconventional, not what can be termed

wrong," said Brooke, availing himself of her eyes being downcast in thought to study the expression of her face.

"I don't see how I could have managed without writing to you," said Stasie, still musing; then suddenly turning her sweet frank eyes upon him, she exclaimed archly, "I don't think you approved of it yourself! I remember I felt so at the time."

"Did you?" exclaimed Brooke. "I am very flattered at your *feeling* any thing respecting my approval!" The words had hardly passed his lips before he felt they were a mistake, although a genuine

expression.

"There is nothing flattering to you in my perceiving that your manner changed in an indefinable way. It only showed I was not quite stupid—I really am not! and I think I am waking up here. I like the place, and I like to see Aunt Clem so happy, and to be in my own house, and able to ask one of the Mathews to stay with me. That girl is Mrs. Mathews' second daughter. She has rather outgrown her strength, and she is not very bright now, but I am quite sure she will turn out much cleverer than they expect."

"I am sure you are a kind hostess, Miss Verner. I am glad to find you are so satisfied with your surroundings. I often thought of you when I was in Munich and Dresden, and Nurnburg especially. You would be charmed with them, especially Nurnburg."

"I wish I had been with you!" cried Stasie warmly, and this time Brooke judiciously held his tongue. "But I have by no means given up my plans, only I see Mr. Harding and Hormuz are determined to oppose me. However, I have a will of my own, I assure you."

"I am already convinced of it," said Brooke,

gravely.

Stasie laughed pleasantly. "Come, now, and see our kitchen garden," she said, and led the way

through a gate in a low wooden paling, overgrown with ivy, into a good-sized patch of ground, where peas, French beans, lettuce, and such finer vegetables seemed flourishing. "It is quite delightful to eat things out of one's own garden, I can assure you; but it takes a great deal of care and trouble to keep it in order.

While she spoke a very unusual figure—unusual at least in a suburban park-came out from behind a high range of scarlet runners. A short slight man, in dark trousers, a sailor-like jacket, and a scarlet and purple waistcoat edged with gold cord; his darkbrown face and large Eastern eyes were surmounted by an embroidered cap.

"Why, what a strange gardener you have, Miss

Verner! Where did you pick him up?"

"I will tell you in a moment," she said smiling, and then nodded to the man, who made a deep bow, carry-

ing his hand to his forehead.

'That is our right-hand man," she resumed, as he passed out of earshot, and they strolled slowly round the garden. "He is from Bombay. He used to be at Mardin, and Hormuz found him by a strange chance. But first I must tell you that I was so delighted with the garden when we came here that I worked too much in it, especially in the sun; and one day, about a fortnight ago, perhaps a little more, I grew queer and giddy, and so sick and uncomfortable! Aunt Clem was quite frightened. Hormuz came down the next day, and made such a fuss. So I said I must have a gardener. Of course Mr. Harding grumbled about the expense. Then Hormuz said he had met a poor Hindoo, who begged of him in the street, and, moved by compassion, he had helped him. (I could not help wondering, Dr. Brooke, if Hormuz really had given him money.) He said he would be thankful to serve us for food and shelter, and that he might be very useful; so he is. He speaks a little English, and is so nice and well-mannered. The servants are delighted

with him. Aunt Clem wanted to put him into livery, but I laughed at her. He keeps the garden very neat, but he does not really understand gardening. Indeed, he ought to have a better situation."

"These Eastern fellows are wonderfully handy and intelligent about work," said Brooke, looking after the lithe figure retreating with a slow, dignified step towards

the house. "He is in luck to get housed here."

"I assure you he is quite a treasure. The little Hardings are so fond of him, and Mr. Robinson (he is a friend of yours, is he not?) talks of converting and baptizing him. If so, I shall be his godmother."
"I think Robinson had better let that alone!" re-

turned Brooke.

Here the sound of voices and footsteps approaching made them look round, and they saw Mrs. Harding

and Janet coming to join them.

After some further conversation Dr. Brooke took leave, having promised to come again soon, and bring the photographs he had collected during his travels for

their inspection.

With a sense of having spent the afternoon pleasantly, he walked at a slow pace down the road, and paused at St. Monica's parsonage, intending, if asked, to dine with his old friend. But Mr. Robinson was out; he had gone to town, his servant said, and was not expected to return till the last train.

Brooke therefore returned to the lodgings in which he had established himself, intending to make London his headquarters for some time, and found them un-

commonly dreary and desolate.

## CHAPTER XIX.

THE day after Dr. Brooke's visit Mr. Harding took a holiday. He had designed a new fowl-house, with some curious arrangements, by which he hoped to

insure the correct return of all eggs laid therein. He rather enjoyed overseeing, and even sharing the work of his employés, especially of extracting the last farth-

ing's worth of labor.

He was in high good-humor—to his wife's relief, as she had, with Stasie, planned a little excursion and gypsy tea at a favorite spot two or three miles distant, where, in the midst of a heathy common, a sudden hillock or knoll was crowned with a clump of larch and pine trees.

The children's ponies and a rusty basket-carriage drawn by one of the horses employed about the place,

were the means of locomotion.

Great were the anticipations called forth by these preparations for an afternoon's outing, and dire the fears lest "papa's" unexpected holiday should inter-

fere with the pleasure party.

However, papa did not want any one but the carpenter and the "odd man" who was generally working about the place. He told them all they might be off as soon as they liked, and desired they should not forget nose-bags for the horses, "as they were by no means to go to any inn or stable, to run up expenses."

They accordingly started in the highest spirits. Ethel and Willie on two little Shetlands, tame as dogs; Janet Mathews, proud and happy, on a mild low-spirited pony of larger size, lent for the occasion by Mr. Robinson; while Stasie, with the courage of ignorance, undertook to drive Mrs. Harding and Mademoiselle in the carriage.

Miss Stretton had declined the party with great regret, but she feared damp, and also dreaded fatigue; though much better, she was glad to say, she was not

yet strong enough to take liberties.

It was not prudence, however, which was really at the bottom of Miss Stretten's refusal, rather a hope that Mr. Kharapet would pay a farewell visit previous to leaving London, as he had not appeared at Limeville for three days. Miss Stretton had fallen so far under his influence that she ardently desired to take his parting instructions in a *tête-à-tête*, and she shrewdly expected that he would not depart without bestowing them.

She had grown to believe her fortunes depended upon the soft-spoken Eastern, who evidently, with all his gentle deference, had some pull upon Mr. Harding in spite of the latter's affectation of blunt strength and overbearing prosperity. Aunt Clem was proud of her own tact in making friends with "that nice kind Mr. Kharapet, who is never tired of helping us in every way, I do trust."—Thus her reflections generally terminated.—"Dearest Stasie will see her own true interest and accept him, but young girls are apt to make fatal mistakes."

Miss Stretton was right. About an hour after the merry party had set out on their expedition, a ring announced a visitor, and Mr. Kharapet, who never took the liberty of entering without notice, was duly heralded by the neat parlor-maid.

"I thought you would come to-day," said Miss Stretton, who was attired in a new and most elaborate cap, as she rose to meet him, "so I refused to go with

the rest to have tea at the larches."

"Is Stasie not at home, then?" asked Kharapet, with a swift glance round the room.

"No: she is gone with Mrs. Harding and the chil-

dren to have a gypsy-tea at some distance."

Kharapet sat down, and a low quick sigh escaped him. "I wished to see her," he said, "but I can wait. I have also to call on Mr. Harding, who was not at his office to-day. And are you well, dear madam? feeling stronger and better?"

Miss Stretton was much better; feeling years

younger in short.

"You continue to find Bhoodhoo useful?"

"Extremely. Indeed, I do not know what we should do without him."

"Ah, that is well. Do not hesitate to make him

work. I doubt not he can cook and do many things, more than you imagine." An abrupt pause, and Aunt Clem observed that Kharapet looked less blandly smiling than usual.

"And what has happened since I saw you last?" he asked, slowly rubbing his hands together, and fixing

his large soft dark eyes on her.

"Not much; that girl is still here. Not that she interferes much, but I don't quite like to see the hold those Mathews' have upon our dear Stasie. She is quite devoted to Janet—inspects her practicing—makes her read aloud—a perfect torture, I assure you, my dear sir! Then there must be eggs beaten up in milk before breakfast; a glass of port-wine at eleven; and calves-foot jelly for supper! really a serious addition to the housekeeping when one has a limited, a very limited allowance! But Stasie is young and enthusiastic, and probably likes having a sort of toy!"

"Probably, probably; still I do not like the idea of all this devotion to the sister of that—that evil-disposed young man, who induced Stasie to part with her jewels. That was a terrible affair. I endured much. I bore

with great provocation."

"No doubt; but, Mr. Kharapet, you need not distress yourself about Bob Mathews! My niece would

not look at him were he hung with diamonds."

"Ha, you think so? Alas! I fear your accustomed wisdom fails you in this matter! How can I account for Stasie's indifference to myself save by her preference for another?"

"Still I do not think she gives a thought to Bob Mathews," persisted Miss Stretton, not noticing the self-conceit of Kharapet's speech. "By the way, I forgot to mention that Dr. Brooke, Mrs. Harding's gargin called here vectorder."

cousin, called here yesterday."

"Did he?" cried Kharapet, a sudden gleam like a flash of forked lightning sparkling in his eyes. He recovered himself instantly. "I thought that gentleman was gone away for a long and indefinite time." "Well, he is back again, and from what I can gather

he is to make some stay in London."

Kharapet murmured something not English, and, rising from his seat, walked to the window, looked out a moment, and returned. "I see Bhoodhoo is busy in the garden," he said. "I trust, then, Stasie does not expose herself to the sun?"

<sup>1</sup> I think not," replied Miss Stretton, and waited, perceiving that Kharapet had more important matter

in his mind.

He resumed his seat. "May I be quite confidential?

You will not betray me?"

"Have I ever betrayed any one?" said Aunt Clem sentimentally, "least of all a good and true friend, as

I believe you to be."

Kharapet smiled, a rather forced smile. "Then, dear Miss Stretton, I will confide to you that I ventured to try my chance with Stasie Verner, and—she refused me."

Miss Stretton sat bolt upright with an expression of the greatest interest and surprise, but she did not in-

terrupt the speaker.

"She did not speak harshly or very decidedly, and I have by no means lost hope; but it is well to be very prudent in such a crisis, and—I confess I fear this proud, cold doctor. He is, no doubt, attracted by Stasie's fortune. I implore you be watchful, and do not encourage him."

"Of course I will not. You know I sincerely wish you success with Stasie. (Sly thing never to tell me a word about your offer!) But I think you alarm yourself unnecessarily," concluded Miss Stretton with a complacent simper, as if she knew a thing or

two.

"How do you mean?" asked Kharapet, eying her

with curiosity.

"Oh! I don't mean much, and I don't know much, only I am convinced that Stasie Verner is *not* the attraction for Dr. Brooke at Sefton Park."

"How? who then? Nay, dear lady, I pray you

speak."

"Well—but remember it is the greatest secret, and I don't mean to say I believe there is any thing really wrong, only——" she paused, and Kharapet kept his great watchful eyes fixed upon her—" I mean to say that I think Dr. Brooke is very fond of, and very sympathetic with, Mrs. Harding."

Kharapet suddenly bent his eyes on the carpet, and kept silence for a moment, while a bland and satisfied

expression spread over his face.

"What reason have you for thinking thus?" he said

softly.

"Ah! my dear sir, I have seen much of the world, of society, I mean, and I have watched and kept my eyes open, and that is the conclusion I have come to."

Some unusual strain of reticence kept Aunt Clem

from disclosing all her reasons.

"It may be so," remarked Kharapet thoughtfully, pressing the palms of his hands together, as though moved in some measure. "Yet what is there to gain in such a connection, whereas Stasie has a fortune—money, available money—and youth, dear lady. Ah! delightful youth."

"Very true; but I don't think Dr. Brooke cares much for money, he has enough for himself, and if he

returns----"

"Ah!" broke in Kharapet with an expressive gesture. "All men care for money—all—all: and Harding, what does he think? does he suspect? It will

bruise his pride."

"Goodness, gracious, Mr. Kharapet, you are running away with the story. I don't think there is any thing for Mr. Harding to suspect. There can't be a nicer, sweeter woman than his wife. It is only the doctor who is a little, just a little fond of her, quite Platonic, you know, and I must say he is very much to be liked; if he did not come in your way I should like him well enough."

This speech puzzled Kharapet a good deal. An Eastern cannot understand Platonics, but he gathered enough to make him feel that Miss Stretton's leaning towards the obnoxious doctor must in some way be rectified, so he shook his head solemnly. "Ah!" he said, "Dr. Brooke is no gentleman, or he would never use the words he did."

"What words?" cried Miss Stretton with keen

curiosity.

"I do not like to repeat them," said Kharapet with soft hesitation.

"Why not, my dear sir, I am supremely safe."

"I would rather not, Miss Stretton."

"Was it any thing against me? Come, I must insist."

"Perhaps, indeed, I ought to tell you. It will show you something of his real nature, which is far from refined."

"You don't say so. Now do tell me."

"It is in strict confidence?"

"Yes, yes, Mr. Kharapet, the strictest."

"Well, then, he called you in my hearing a talkative old cat."

An awful silence followed, and then Miss Stretton said with a little scornful laugh, "I am sure I am very much obliged to him, considering he had never met me but once, and then I did not say half a dozen words. Pray, how and where did he say this? I thought he went away the day after I saw him at York Gate."

"He did, but not till the evening, and I happened to meet him at a restaurant, where we both dined."

"Oh! it is really not worth noticing, only I am surprised that a man of Dr. Brooke's position would express himself in such a vulgar, not to say low fashion! I must say he is not a fit companion for our dear Stasie. I am sure, Mrs. Harding is welcome to her elegant cousin."

"You see you have drawn forth this statement, and now I trust myself in your hands."

"And I am sure you may! Do not be discouraged, my dear sir; the whims of young girls are unaccountable, and I dare say Stasie is even now regretting her ill-considered conduct. You may leave yourself in my hands, Mr. Kharapet, I will back you up all I can."

"I have full faith in you, but I deeply regret being obliged to leave town just now; however, I cannot offend my good and powerful patrons, but I will return as soon as I can. I fear I must bid you good-morning now, as I have a visit to pay to Mr. Harding. Oblige me by not letting Stasie know that I confided my disappointment to you; let us gently guide her in the way she should go, and trust me. Never can I forget your faithful friendship."

It was late when Kharapet's interview with Mr. Harding was over, and he walked down the garden to the road, with any thing but a satisfied expression. Mr. Harding was not particularly glad to see him, and though, as usual, he yielded to his colleague's wishes on sundry points, he did so with unmistakable reluctance, so that Kharapet feared unwilling co-operation might prove little different from opposition.

Reaching the road, Kharapet paused, and mused for a moment. Then, turning in an opposite direction to the railway station, walked slowly for some hundred yards or so, not heeding the closing day nor the fact that he ran the risk of losing the last train to town.

Soon the sound of horses' feet and the laughter of children reached his ear, and he paused again, till the returning gypsy-party came up, and he was cordially greeted by its more juvenile members, for he was decidedly a favorite with Willie, Ethel, and their new playfellow Janet.

He turned with them, walking beside the pony-carriage till they reached Sefton House, where Janet Mathews bade them good-evening, and trotted off to

restore her pony to his rightful owner; Mrs. Harding was occupied with Willie, who seemed over tired, and did not press Stasie to come in, so they parted at the gate.

"I can walk back with you," said Kharapet.

"Had you not better go on quick or you will lose your train?" returned Stasie, wishing to avoid him, yet not liking visibly to decline his escort.

"I have lost it," he said, "but by walking on to

Welwood I can get a later train on the chief line."

"I am sure you can have the pony-carriage. I know you are not accustomed to walking."

"I prefer it now," replied Kharapet, "and I want to

speak to you."

"Oh! very well," said Stasie, seeing there was no escape, and they walked on for some minutes in silence.

"I am going away to-morrow for some weeks," be-

gan Kharapet at last, and he stopped suddenly.

"I am sure I hope you will enjoy yourself," said

"Do you think I shall, Stasie?"

"Why not? you are going to be *fêtêd* and petted by all the great ladies, to see heaps of lovely things, and to eat delightful dinners, and all for nothing, not a penny to pay."

"Stasie," stepping a little in front of her and barring the way, "why do you mock me? Do you not fear that you will turn my love to hate? Take care! a little more—and—and tenderness will harden into

revenge!"

"Do not talk in that way, Hormuz," said Stasie, not frightened, but vexed and uncomfortable. "Why have you not the sense to see that there is no use in it? I never can like you, love you, I mean, as you wish. I cannot tell why, you are very handsome and pleasant, and you will find plenty of girls who would be very pleased to marry you, but I cannot, and there's an end of it."

"But I want you, only you," whispered Kharapet,

creeping close to her. "Why will you not be my wife?

I would teach you to love me."

"That you would not," exclaimed Stasie with much animation. "I liked you much better before you wanted to marry me! I do not wish to marry any one. I wish to enjoy myself, and to be free, at least, till I

am of age."

"Ha!" cried Kharapet, suddenly grasping her wrist with more force than could be expected from his slender hand. "Will you promise, solemnly, sacredly promise me not to marry until you are twenty-one? If you do, I will endure, I will be silent. Will you promise me, Stasie?"

"Indeed I will not. Why should I?" she exclaimed indignantly, and wrenching her hand from him. He had never dared so much before. "I am tolerably sure I shall not marry before I am one-and-twenty, but

I promise nothing."

"No, you will not promise; you wish to deceive me. But you do not. I understand you. I know every design that forms itself in your heart; you will wed, and that soon. If, oh! foolish one, you can win that cold, stern, scornful doctor—but he cares nothing for you—his eyes and his thoughts are with another. He heeds you no more than——"he paused and struck his open palms, slanting first up then down across each other with that peculiarly Oriental gesture indicative of noth-

ingness.

"How dare you speak to me of Dr. Brooke?" cried Stasie, panting with indignation. "Can I not speak like a lady to a gentleman without your intruding your miserable suspicions, your wretched misunderstandings, to worry and annoy me? You don't understand English people—you never will! Do you think I cannot speak to a man without looking on him as a lover? without wanting him as a lover? He may love any one and every one but me, and yet be an agreeable companion, which you have not been of late! I used to like you; why do you persist in worrying me into dislike?"

"Stasie," returned Kharapet huskily, "you are cruel -you are very hard to me, and all because I love you too well!"

"I am sure I wish you would not. You were far

nicer when you did not."

"I cannot help it," said Kharapet in a tone of despair that touched Stasie's heart. "And is this your

last word—is there no more hope—none?"

"None whatever," she returned, not unkindly; "and I do wish you would put all hopes and ideas about me out of your head; then we could be friends again. I should be so pleased to be friends with you, Hormuz, but I never can while you tease me. Do be sensible."

"And you wish me to be content with this?"

"Yes, and so will you be if you make up your mind. Perhaps you will see some nice fair girl at the Saintsbury's or at Lady Kilconquhar's, and take a fancy to

her! and she may have money too--"

"Be silent!" exclaimed Kharapet, vehemently, rudely. "Why do you taunt me? I love you for your beauty-your charm-your devilish charm which I cannot resist! And so you would—you would have my friendship, Stasie, and nothing more?"

"I would value it very much; you would find me grateful," said Stasie, more calmly than she might have done had there been light enough to show her the expression of her companion's eyes. A deep silence ensued, which lasted till they were close at the gate of Stasie's house, when Kharapet spoke softly in an altered voice. "I will never offend you again," he said. "I will never speak of love to you; I will put it out of my heart forever." He dwelt on the last two words. "You will forgive my offenses and trust me once more?"

"I will, indeed, and like you as much as I used," cried Stasie cheerfully, for something in his tone

struck her as being peculiarly earnest.
"Give me your hand, then." Stasie held it out. He

took and kissed it twice, a long kiss; then letting it go,

he murmured something not English.

The few remaining steps were accomplished in silence, and at the gate they met Bhoodhoo, who explained that the "mem Sahib" had sent him to seek "missee."

"I will say good-night, then," said Kharapet in the same softly subdued voice that so touched his hearer; "and when I return, you will find your wishes accomplished so far as I can school myself."

"Well, good-by; and I do hope you will have a very pleasant trip," said Stasie heartily. She did not offer

him her hand, but ran quickly indoor.

The Hindoo accompanied his benefactor a pace or two; they exchanged a few sentences, then, with a deep salaam, he stopped and returned to the villa.

When Stasie opened her eyes the next morning, her first thought was that Kharapet had gone away—that for a fortnight or three weeks at all events she should not see him—should not be offended and made uncomfortable by the glances she had learned to understand—by the whispers which moved her to a strange mixture of pity and disgust. Her sense of relief, too, was heightened by recalling the tone in which he had promised her to renounce and conquer the love that she found unacceptable. If he did so, she might in time feel at ease with him, but never again could she feel as she once did. Then she wondered vaguely why Kharapet—handsome, graceful, devoted as he was—should have inspired her with a sense of angry repulsion. She

She had risen and dressed while she pondered these things, and, finding she was yet early, took a book and wandered into the garden, enjoying the crisp fresh-

could not account for it, -she was only very certain of

the impression.

ness of the early autumn, and still thinking over her

conversation with Kharapet.

She felt as if she had grown years older since she had left school—since she had come in contact with a passion which revolted rather than flattered her; she had the instinct of a warm pure nature that feels lowered in its own esteem by words of ardent love from any save its own true mate. This Kharapet could never be, and she looked back with a half angry feeling that she should have been so rudely startled into full womanly consciousness by a creature she nearly hated, and certainly despised. "Yet I am most ungrateful," she argued with herself. "Because Hormuz does not suit my fancy, am I to dislike him when he has really been good to me? As to his being greedy about money, I suppose he has never had a chance of knowing any thing but money making. I am sure Mr. Harding is as bad, and I have not the same feeling about him."

Meanwhile there was one point of last evening's talk from which Stasie tried to turn her thoughts, but it would come and place itself clear and distinct before her mental vision. This was the assertion made by Kharapet, with scarce suppressed fury, that she (Stasie) was ready to wed if she could win Dr. Brooke, but that he was utterly indifferent to her. How was it he dared to say this? or rather how came he to think it? She well remembered the bitter mortification with which she attributed Brooke's change of manner towards herself to a wish to show her there was no use in falling in love with him. Was it possible that her conduct had given the same impression to Kharapet? If so, appearances must have gone far beyond reality; and yet she knew in her heart what a charm Dr. Brooke's conversation, manner, voice, had for her; how unconsciously she had grown to look for his coming-to feel that he took an interest in her. Yes, blushing there alone in the still fresh morning, she acknowledged that she could have loved him well, if so superior a being would have deigned to care for a half-educated schoolgirl like herself; as it was, she did not of course. No; he might be far above her as an archangel, yet she would not give her heart unasked. Foolish child! she little thought it had gone from her,—not perhaps irrevocably,—yet never again would any other make quite the same impression.

She certainly would like to know who that "other" was with whom, according to Kharapet, his eyes and thoughts were occupied; but this was folly—she would not dwell on the idea in any way. She tried to fix her mind on her book, but, finding this of no avail, and observing the new factorum at work in the kitchen

garden, she strolled away to talk to him.

After bidding him good-morning, Stasie stood for a moment watching him weed the bed on which he was engaged, and then said:

"Mr. Kharapet tells me you were in the service of

the Consul at Mardin?"

"Yes, missee! I served the 'Bourra Sahib,' your good second father."

"How long were you with him?"

"Five, six—eight years. I mind you very much at the big house, one little missee baba! and you was the apple of the eye of the old man. He did plenty cry when you leave him to go with Padre Sahib to this country."

"I cannot remember you, Bhoodhoo; I only re-

member my nurse."

"She was a very good ayah—big black woman, went away too with you."

"Why did you leave my father?"

"A great traveling gentleman who liked my khabobs and curries, my helwa and féziljan; he asked the Bourra Sahib to let me go with him to Bombay. I like to go back to my country. Then bad man he steal my few pice; then I go for cook on one great big ship, and cross the black water—got sick in London, got no money, meet Kharapet Sahib, he speak

to me in my own language; he very good to me; then brought me to you."

"And are you content to stay in our quiet house?"

"Yes, missee, I like it much; you all very good; like to be in same house with daughter of old master! I will serve her well and make her many nice things to eat."

"I wish you would make me some helwa; I like it very much, and currie. I have not tasted currie for a long time."

"I can make them good-very good."

"Very well, Bhoodhoo. Is it not dark and cold in

this country?"

"It makes more cold and black to have no pice and to be with strangers. You not stranger to me. I mind you very little baba, and it do me plenty good to serve the same little child, now one beautiful mem Sahib."

"I am very pleased to have you here, Bhoodhoo. If you serve me well, I shall not forget to reward you."

"Missee Sahib will be pleased with me, I have no fear."

Here the conversation was interrupted by Janet Mathews, who came quickly from the house, letters in her hands and tears in hereyes.

"Here is a letter for you, Stasie, from mother, and I have one too. She says I must really go home next week. The classes have begun, and she is sure you

have had enough of me."

"Indeed, I have not," said Stasie kindly, and, putting her arm over Janet's shoulder, turned with her towards the open window of the drawing-room.

"What does Mrs. Mathews say?"

"Oh, she writes in excellent spirits. Ella has got her house nearly finished, and mother has a new boarder at the full price, and Atty is getting on ever so much better than ever he did before; but I wish I could stay only a little while longer, only I fancy mother really wants me. What does she say in your letter, Stasie?"

Stasie opened and looked through it.

"Very much the same as in yours, dear. She evidently does want you at home. Mary is too young to be of much use. How glad I am that Ella is so happy and comfortable! Well, Janet, you certainly shall not go until after the school feast, then I think I must let you return. Is Aunt Clem in the breakfast-room?"

"Not yet, but I heard her calling Mary, so I suppose

breakfast is ready."

"Let us come in, then."

## CHAPTER XX.

THOUGH London, at least that part of it which may be termed "clubland," was a desert, Brooke did not hurry away to the enjoyments offered him in the north. His journey would keep for a week he thought, especially as he received an invitation from his friend Robinson to join in the rustic festivities which were to be held at the rectory, and to dine with him after. Brooke, very willing to visit Sefton Park on any pretext, readily accepted, and found himself thinking the intervening days uncommonly long.

The anticipated day was dull, oppressive, and threatening. Nevertheless, Brooke found the little station at Sefton Park quite gay and animated, as most of the owners of the "Houses," "Villas," and cottages in the lower portions of the Park had made holiday and invited guests from town. On reaching the parsonage he found that the young incumbent had already gone to the scene of action, but left word that

Mrs. Harding would not probably go till later.

At Sefton House, accordingly, he found the mistress waiting for him, and in the porch reading. She told him the children had gone on with Mademoiselle, as they were too full of assisting at Stasie's table to have any patience. And, having administered a biscuit and a glass of sherry to her guest, they set out together.

"Be sure you have every thing ready for your mas-

ter's dinner," said Mrs. Harding to the servant as they left the house. "He may return early, and you must not think of leaving the house until he has dined. Susan shall return about five, and then cook may come, and you as soon as your master has been served. I fancy there will be some dancing as late as half-past six. Iwill not stay much later than five o'clock myself."

"Very well'm," returned Jane, but she did not look

well pleased.

"I see you spoil your husband as much as ever," observed Brooke, as they walked leisurely along under the arching boughs of the big elms, between which the evening sunshine pierced, lying in broad streaks of golden light across the grassy sides and gray roadway of the avenue.

"After all these years I am not likely to change my system," she replied. "Besides, it is, I fear, too late; but I wish he had consented either to stay here and

join us or dine in town."

"Take my advice—do not return until late; let him take care of himself for once; he can join you if he likes."

"But he will be so cross and say disagreeable things,

and----"

"Let him for once. Make a stand. It riles me frightfully to see you enslaved in this way. One could forgive him a good deal if he could not bear you out of his sight; but you say his motive is different."

"Oh," said Mrs. Harding, laughing, "I do not flatter myself that my society gives him the slightest

pleasure, but I always try to keep the peace."

"To secure which it is necessary to be well armed. Believe me, Livy, excessive yielding is just as fatal to peace as excessive opposition. Make a stand this evening; I'll back you up—you risk nothing."

"I feel half tempted to try—but hark! What a fearful amount of big-drumming—the fête seems in

full swing."

They had reached a sudden bend in the avenue,

where it descended a steep incline, and a small turnstile admitted to a path across a couple of the rector's fields which led to a pretty byroad debouching on the old, gray, ivy-grown parish church and the entrance to the rectory. The gate stood hospitably open; the lodge was deserted, so Mrs. Harding and Brooke walked up to the house unquestioned.

The approach between large old laurels was short, and on reaching the entrance a large grassy space, shaded by fine trees and bordered by flower-beds, was discernible beyond a further angle of the comfortable

homely mansion.

Here a long table, decorated with fruit and flowers,

was spread for special guests.

Guiding her companion round to the back front of the house, Mrs. Harding paused to look at the scene presented by a large field dotted with one or two groups of trees, and separated from the pleasureground by a sunk fence, bridged at one side for the

occasion by a temporary planking.

To the left, near the sunk fence, was a large tent. One side was open, displaying three long tables, which were crowded with boys and girls of all ages, from two years old and upwards, while the clatter of plates, the busy hum of voices, the various smart young ladies and clerical-looking young men flitting to and fro with sugar and milk, jugs of tea, and baskets full of buns, showed that the feast was at its height. Still a large contingent of the holiday-makers were "playing blindman's-buff" and "thread the needle," besides occupying a couple of swings, which were surrounded with clamorous groups.

On a broad graveled walk before the windows of the drawing and dining rooms were two rows of chairs for the dignified spectators, among whom Mrs. Harding found a few acquaintances, when she had presented Brooke to Mrs. Dale, the rector's wife, who was a little querulous about the innovations of modern fashion. "Yes, yes, it is all very fine to see them amusing them-

selves; but when we came here first no one ever thought of such things; nobody wanted them, and we

did just as well without them."

Leaving Mrs. Harding to play audience, Brooke strolled away across the foot-bridge and into the tent, where he was soon pounced upon by Willie. "Oh, Dr. Brooke! do come over to our side. Come and help me—Stasie has given me five little children to wait upon, and they have eaten twenty-seven buns already, and I have spilt nearly a whole cup of tea up my sleeve; it is so uncomfortable."

"I should think it was. Where is Miss Verner?"

"Just at the end, near Aunt Clem. Aunt Clem is pouring out tea, only she doesn't do much. She has Bhoodhoo to help her. See! there's Bhoodhoo—no, he's gone. He has his best things on,—his sash and his embroidered cap,—and he looks quite grand!"

By the time Willie had uttered all this very volubly, they had managed to make their way to the head of a table where Miss Stretton was enthroned in a state of beatitude, attired in lavender silk and black lace, with the obsequious Bhoodhoo at her orders, and an elegant, dignified, fresh-colored portly divine, held in animated conversation behind her chair, while a large vessel of the tea-urn order, over which she was supposed to preside, was left neglected, its tap at the mercy of all who chose to turn it.

"Oh, Dr. Brooke! how do you do?" cried Stasie, who was holding a large jug to be replenished from the above-mentioned vessel. "Take care, or I may

scald you! We are tremendously busy."

"So I see! Can I help you?"

"Yes! Just take this tea, and fill the cups down this

side. Janet and I can take the milk and sugar."

Brooke readily obeyed, and was not a little amused by the whole scene. The intense eagerness of the children to cram as much cake and swallow as many cups of tea as possible in the time allowed, as they were fed in relays; the sudden demureness as soon as any of the young ladies, Sunday-school teachers, or curates came near, and the outburst of giggles, pinchings, and grabbings directly that pressure was removed. The grace and elegance of some of the genteel servitors, the business-like attention of others, notably Janet Mathews. Stasie was the busiest there, with pleasant words and kind attentions for the old grannies, who were brought to balance the juveniles, and who seemed to enjoy themselves the most of the two.

At last the intensity of demand and supply relaxed; and Stasie, pausing from her efforts, leant against one of the tent-poles and fanned herself, while Miss Stretton's clerical friend proposed a hymn of thanksgiving, collected the children, and started the tune himself in a very fair tenor voice. His call was eagerly responded to, a noise being always acceptable to the young, and soon a chorus, loud and shrill, if not harmonious, rang out, startling those conservatives, the rooks, who showed their displeasure by sailing away in a floating phalanx towards the quiet country further west.

But the claimants for tea and buns began to diminish and sink into a mere dribble of greedy boys seeking for more, and soon the attendants began to clear away

the débris.

"You have done your duty like a Briton, Miss Verner," said Brooke, who had walked round among the holiday-makers with Willie for a guide, and now returned. "You must be tired. Come and sit down in the garden. I believe Mrs. Harding is there."

"I have not seen her all day," said Stasie. "Do you

know if Mr. Harding came back early?"

"No. At least I heard his wife giving very special instructions respecting his reception when he did return."

Stasie shrugged her shoulders expressively, but said nothing. She looked pale and thoughtful, and Brooke was aware of a very strong desire to make her talk. He was dimly conscious of some change in her, towards himself especially, which roused his curiosity and interest.

"Where is your picturesque friend, Mr. Kharapet?" he asked. "He would have been a great addition to such a gathering as this, and it would have been quite

in his line too."

"He is not in town," she returned; "he has gone to pay some visits in the country. I do not think he would care for a school feast. It really takes a long time to understand the great difference of idea and feeling between an Eastern and ourselves. Hormuz certainly understands English perfectly, and speaks it as well as I do, I dare say more grammatically; yet I am quite sure when I talk to him of plans and—and the future, and my own fancies, I speak an unknown tongue."

"I have no doubt you do. Hollo! what's the matter?"—this to a wee toddler of three or four, who, hurrying to overtake some elder play-fellows, stumbled, fell, and, finding his retreat cut off by strangers, set up

a howl of dismay.

"Poor little soul! he is frightened," said Stasie, stooping to pick him up. "Where are your school-fellows?"

"I want Sally," sobbed the child; "I want Sally!"

"Come, we will go and look for her," said Stasie kindly; "and if you stop crying I will give you a nice sweetie."

The urchin listened to the voice of the charmer, and opened his mouth. Stasie took a bonbonnière from her pocket, from which she extracted a morsel of thick whitish paste, and popped it into the expectant jaws.

"Is that good?" she asked. But the consoled one made no sign, and Stasie was about to renew her proposition to seek for Sally, when a stout girl in a straw hat and fiery pink ribbons came running up

"Oh, Dicky! you naughty boy! I thought you

were lost. What are you eating?"

"Only a sweetie I comforted him with. Do not

lose sight of him again," said Stasie. "He was dread-

fully frightened."

"Oh! thank you, miss, thank you! Make a bow to the lady, Dick!" But Dick was impenetrable. He clung to Sally, and hid his face in her frock, as she led him away.

"What a fine little savage!" said Brooke laughing,

"though not grateful."

"And the sweetie was very good. Will you have some? Perhaps you have tasted this kind of thing before. It is a Baghdad or Mardin sweet; almost the only thing I remember in Syria."

Brooke took a piece, and after a few seconds replied, "No, I never met any thing like this. It is very good. Where do you get it?"

"Bhoodhoo makes it for me and for the little Hard-

ings; they are very fond of helwa."

While talking thus they crossed the plank which led to the pleasure-ground, and found the children of the neighboring gentry arranging themselves for a countrydance, which Mrs. Harding was assisting to organize.

"Do look at Ethel shaking out her skirts," said

Stasie laughing; "she is such a little coquette."

"I believe she is. She will be charming. For my part, I like coquettes; they stir the pool of life."
"But not a real coquette," said Stasie, opening her

large eyes—" a cold heartless coquette?"

"No; not a monster of loveliness and cruelty—such as you meet in the penny dreadfuls," returned Brooke, laughing. "I fancy a man must be wanting in observation if a coquette takes him in long; but they had better make haste and get their dance over, for the rain is coming at last, or I am very much mistaken."

Stasie and her cavalier had strolled along under some wide-spreading elms which shaded the stretch of grass where the dancers were collected, and where, almost out of sight themselves, they could see the general company. As she made no reply Brooke turned to look at his companion, but at the same moment she caught his arm and suddenly tottered against him, while her eyes were half closed, and one hand was outstretched as if groping in the dark.

"You are ill," exclaimed Brooke, putting his arm

round her.

She was silent, and her head fell against his breast. She was not insensible—for her lips moved, but no sound came from them. Brooke looked hastily round; a seat was near, he lifted her to it, intending to call Mrs. Harding when he had placed her there, but, with a long shivering sigh, she seemed to come to herself, turning her eyes slowly on him with a puzzled look, and trembling violently.

Still holding his arm with one hand, she passed the other over her brow. "What is the matter?" she

asked, in a low thick voice.

"You are overcome with heat and fatigue, I imagine," said Brooke, looking anxiously at her. "If I could leave you I would get you a glass of water."

"Don't leave me," said Stasie, still as if with difficulty. "I am better." She sighed deeply and pressed her hand on her heart, letting Brooke's arm go to do so. He was quite still and silent, watching her while she slowly tried to untie the lace handkerchief round her throat; gradually the pallor of her face grew a little less death-like, and again she sighed as if oppressed; but she was now quite herself, though she spoke slowly and her voice sounded weak.

"What could it have been?" she asked, with a wondering look at her companion. "I was not so very tired or overcome with heaf; and I am always well. I never had any thing the matter with me. When the Mathews children had measles and scarlatina I never took either, though I helped to nurse them."

"Some slight changes in your system of life, your diet—it is hard to say what without some examination—might cause such an attack," said Brooke, who saw she was a little alarmed; "indigestion might have such results."

"I have not eaten much to-day," replied Stasie. "It was a horrible feeling; every thing seemed suddenly to grow so indistinct, as if waving to and fro. I felt that for a minute or two, and then my heart beat as if it would burst; it was horrible." She paused. "There; I am much better, and I will not think any more about it, but I will find Aunt Clem. I should like to go home."

"Wait," said Brooke, who was more impressed by Stasie's sudden seizure than he wished her to perceive. "Don't try to walk just yet; you will be all right in a few minutes. I can see Miss Stretton—away there by the house; she is in deep conversation with the rector.

I can bring her to you in a moment."

"I would rather not, thank you; she would make a dreadful fuss. I am nearly well, and I shall just steal away by myself; then you can tell Mrs. Harding."

"You shall not walk home alone," said Brooke de-

cidedly. "I will go with you."

"Very well," replied Stasie quietly; "but when I reach home I shall find no one in the house. We had better tell Mrs. Harding."

Brooke was conscious of a strong desire to take

charge of her himself away from all interference.

The magic of contact, the unconscious grace of her attitude as she leant helplessly against him, the natural fear with which she tried to keep him beside her—all seemed to give sudden life to the fire that had long smoldered in his heart, almost unknown to himself. He recognized not only that she was sweet and fair,—a most excellent specimen of youthful womanhood,—but that she had for him the subtle mysterious individual charm, which made her the one thing needful to his life. All this came to him in a flash of instantaneous revelation, and he as instantly strove to master the impression, smiling in his own mind at such boyish folly.

But this swift wave of sensation passing over the electric "chain with which we are darkly bound"

made no difference in his quiet grave kindliness of manner. "Shall I bring Mrs. Harding to you?"

"Oh, no! I can walk to her quite well, and presently I will ask Mary—one of our servants—to come

back and stay with me."

"I will go with you to your house," replied Brooke; "and let me beg of you, Miss Verner, to take medical advice; some very slight remedial measure may save you from a repetition."

"Oh, yes! I will see Dr. Hunter," interrupted Stasie, hastily, as if she feared to allow him to finish his sentence. "He is such a nice, dear old man; he has

done Janet so much good."

"Don't be afraid; I shall not insist upon prescrib-

ing for you," said Brooke, smiling.

"Oh, I did not mean that," exclaimed Stasie, now speaking in her natural voice. "You are having your holiday, and it would be too bad to make you work;" and she colored up, looking quite like herself.

"Ah! Miss Verner, that is all very well, but you

evidently have no faith in my skill."

"I trust I shall not want much of any one's skill. I feel so much better that I am already ashamed of the fuss I made," looking shyly into Brooke's eyes.

"You were a little frightened. Eh, Miss Verner?

but I don't think you made much fuss."

"I am all right now, at any rate," cried Stasie. "I

begin to forget I felt so ill."

"Do not forget to consult your favorite doctor however. Are you quite equal to go and look for Mrs. Harding?"

"Oh! quite, quite; but I do hope I shall not feel

that horrible sensation again."

"I dare say a little care will prevent its return," said Brooke cheerfully. "Are you sure you feel equal to walking?"

"Yes, quite sure, though I feel a little dazed and giddy." She rose as she spoke, and walked steadily,

though slowly, back to the house, while Brooke watched her with a new interest.

"Where have you been, Stasie; and what is the

matter, dear? You look ill."

Stasie gave a slight description of her faintness, and

said she would like to return home.

"I will go with you," said Mrs. Harding. "I have had enough of the *fête*, and the children are quite safe with Mademoiselle. I must tell Miss Stretton, however."

## CHAPTER XXI.

THE school feast had brought Miss Stretton nothing but unalloyed pleasure. She had been treated with the utmost consideration; dignified divines had bestowed much conversation upon her, she had been given a seat among the magnates of the neighborhood, while she saw many of her acquaintances from the park wandering unheeded among the promiscuous multitude. All these privileges disposed her to remain where she was, though on hearing Mrs. Harding's account of Stasie's indisposition she immediately proposed to accompany her niece home. It was not difficult, however, to convince her that she had better stay where she was, as Mrs. Harding wished to leave on her own account, and it would be unkind to take Janet away in the height of her enjoyment; moreover, the shades of night would soon be closing, and then all must retire.

The Rev. St. John Robinson, disentangling himself from a group of the younger children, whom he was assisting to play oranges and lemons, came up hastily to beg Miss Stretton not to leave, as some hymns were to be sung before the party broke up, which he thought would please her. He was much concerned to hear Miss Verner had been so unwell. It was such a pity

she was obliged to go, etc. "I shall be at the parsonage by seven o'clock," he said earnestly, aside to Brooke. "You will wait if you arrive before me, and there is to be a train as late as nine-thirty this evening, so we can have a quiet talk."

Brooke assented, and then hastened to overtake Stasie and Mrs. Harding, who were walking slowly to-

wards home across the fields.

Stasie, always affirming that she felt quite well, quite herself, was very quiet and silent, while Mrs. Harding and her cousin talked pleasantly on many topics, the latter watching the fair invalid from time to time with keen but unobtrusive attention.

On approaching Sefton House they perceived Mr. Harding and another gentleman strolling to and fro in

the garden as they enjoyed their cigars.

"Who can Mr. Harding have brought with him?" exclaimed Mrs. Harding. "It is most unusual for him to find unexpected guests."

"I think," said Stasie, raising her head, "it looks

like young Mr. Pearson."

"It cannot be," said Mrs. Harding, greatly surprised. But further speech was cut short by Mr. Harding and his companion advancing to meet them, when Stasie's conjecture proved to be right.

"Ah! here you are; I scarcely expected you so soon," cried Mr. Harding, who seemed to be in an excellent humor. "It is fortunate I came home in good time, or our friend here, Mr. Pearson, would

have had his ride for nothing."

Upon this salutations were exchanged. Young Pearson was looking bright and *debonnaire*. He was admirably dressed. A mixture of boyish frank gayety and soldierly à *plomb* gave a charm to his manner, and made him a general favorite.

Stasie was quite pleased to see him. He brought an atmosphere of healthy joyous youth with him that

was peculiarly acceptable to her.

"Did you ride all the way from London?" she

asked, when, having shaken hands with Mrs. Harding,

he passed on to her.

"Oh, no. I came over from Hounslow. We are quartered there, about five or six miles off. I only returned last Saturday. I have been staying with my people in the Highlands—nice place—rather sorry to leave, though it is great luck to be sent to Hounslow."

"Is it?" said Stasie; but Mr. Pearson was shaking hands with Brooke, and Mr. Harding was saying, "I suppose you are glad enough to get away from the row; we could hear the big drum here. Where are

Miss Stretton and the children?"

Mrs. Harding explained that Stasie had been overcome by the oppressiveness of the weather, by the heat of the tent, or the fatigue of helping so many, and felt faint, so faint that had not Dr. Brooke been beside her she would have fallen.

"Ha! that was well managed, Stasie," cried Mr. Harding with rough jocularity, "to have the doctor beside you. A strapping fellow too, able to hold

you up."

"Oh, I did not want much holding up," she returned wearily. "The feeling soon passed away; but I should like to lie down and rest now."

"Will you come to my room then?" asked Mrs.

Harding.

"No, dear, thank you, I should like to go home.

Aunt Clem said she would send Mary back."

"Oh, nonsense," said Mr. Harding. "You are all right now. You stay and dine. Mr. Pearson has promised to wait for dinner. I suppose Madame has something for us to eat? and," with a little hesitation, "Dr. Brooke, I hope you will stay also."

"Thank you, I am engaged to Mr. Robinson."

"And indeed I had better go home," said Stasie.
"I do not feel as if I could speak a word; you will be better without me."

"That I cannot believe," said Pearson with a bow.

"Now, Stasie, I'd give long odds that if the doctor staid you would," cried Mr. Harding. "Come, doctor, change your mind, and persuade your patient to do likewise."

Stasie was very vexed at this rude speech, but though still feeling dazed, she collected sufficiently to say, "I should be very pleased to dine with Dr. Brooke and all

of you, but I do not feel equal to it."

"I am so sorry, Miss Verner," said Mr. Pearson. "You ought not to have overdone it, attending to those brats. If you will allow me to call, I will ride over the day after to-morrow to ask how you are going on."

"I will not press you, Stasie," said Mrs. Harding, for you would be better lying down in the dark; but

I will walk with you to your house."

The whole party therefore moved on, Stasie between Mrs. Harding and Pearson, and Dr. Brooke with Mr. Harding. "Have a cigar, doctor?" he asked after a pause, a question he rarely put, giving not being one of his weaknesses. Brooke accepted and struck a light in silence. "I never was so surprised," continued Harding, "as when young Pearson turned up just now. By George! I could hardly make him out. He seems to have taken a sudden liking to Mrs. Harding and myself. Lord! doctor, it is easy to see his little game; he is going in for the heiress. be as good as a play to see Kharapet's face when he comes back. Of course I am disposed to be on Kharapet's side; but that young Pearson would be a very suitable match, good-looking, well off (may be rich if the General does not go into too many companies), young and taking. I don't think Kharapet would have a chance with him, only Stasie Verner has her crochets, and is obstinate, devilish obstinate, about them. I do think Kharapet is really far gone about her, independent of the money."

"I fancy your Eastern friend might overlook the charms, or want of charms in a bride, provided he se-

cured the needful!"

"You are right! He would have married a Hottentot Venus, but finding a deuced handsome girl attached to the cash made him wild to secure both. I don't mean to say that he hasn't a chance, but I am inclined to think it isn't much of a one."

Brooke smoked for a few moments in silence, a whole regiment of unwelcome ideas having been evoked by Mr. Harding's remarks. Kharapet had, he felt sure, no chance with a girl like Stasie Verner, though he was capable of trying every means, honest or dishonest, to obtain her and hers; but the gay, gallant young Lancer might take any girl's fancy. Brooke's heart sank while he looked after the graceful well-set-up soldierly figure, as he could not have dreamed it would when he started that morning. What a doubtful good money was to a girl! Here were a set of sharpers, or little better, trying to snap up a diamond of the purest water for the sake of the setting.

"I presume," he said at last, impelled by an irresistible desire to draw Mr. Harding into further talk on this interesting topic, "I presume you would prefer the young lady to marry an Englishman."

"I don't know," replied Harding cautiously. "Kharapet is not a bad fellow, and quite Europeanized. He is desperate fond of her, and he will be sure to take care of her property. He looks on it already as his own, for if Stasie were out of the way of course it would be. He will be in a devil of a temper if she won't marry him, and she might do worse. He is hand and glove with the swells. He ain't bad-looking. Once married, I suppose one man is about as good as another."

"I don't suppose you would like your wife to take

that view of the subject?"

"My wife. Oh! that's another matter! She knows I picked her out for herself alone when I might have had a fortune, I dare say, for the asking. She ought to think me A1, but she and Stasie are a pair, they

both have crotchets. I never thought two women would stick so close to each other."

"Ah! possibly there are depths in feminine nature

you have not fathomed."

"Very likely," returned Harding with a vague irritating sense of being sneered at. "I have had other fish to fry, and leave it to parsons and doctors, who find it pay probably to sound the depths you talk about!"

Perceiving that his companion was nettled, Dr. Brooke laughed good-humoredly. "Yes, I dare say we find our account in ministering to the delicate maladies of our fair patients."

"Well, what a heap of humbug goes to grease the wheels of every profession. By George! I begin to

think trade is the honestest of the lot."

"It has great capabilities for the other thing, how-

ever," returned Brooke.

"Perhaps so—perhaps so," said Harding carelessly; but Mrs. Harding had now paused at the gate of Limeville, and Stasie was bidding Mr. Pearson good-evening.

"Good-by, Jim," said Mrs. Harding to her cousin.
"I am going in with Stasie, and shall not see you again.

Come back soon."

"I shall," he returned. "I shall come to-morrow to ask how Miss Verner goes on. I depend on you to call in the local doctor; a seizure of this kind may be nothing, and may indicate the necessity for careful treatment. Besides, I am going to Scotland for a week or two on Thursday. I am half sorry I said I would go."

"Oh! thank you!" exclaimed Stasie. "I am quite well; there is nothing really the matter with me! only

that tent was so hot and airless."

"You ought not to be so careless of yourself, Miss Verner!" said the Lancer sagely. "Good people are scarce; it would not be so easy to replace you!"

"In short, when Nature molded me, she broke the

die, eh, Mr. Pearson?" said Stasie, laughing.

He murmured a reply which Brooke did not hear, and then with a general good-night Stasie went into the house.

"You will attend to what I say, will you not?" were Brooke's last words to his cousin, as he turned

and walked on to St. Monica's parsonage.

But the parson had not yet arrived, so the severe Amazonian female, who had received Brooke a few hours before, ushered him into a nondescript apartmenthalf study, half drawing-room-not uncomfortable though poorly furnished. A horse-hair sofa was embellished by a couple of splendidly-embroidered, luxurious-looking velvet and satin cushions, every chair had a more or less elaborately-worked anti-macassar; and before the fireplace stretched a fender-stool, elegantly adorned with a pattern of blue and white beads on a crimson cloth ground. The window-curtains of chintz were scanty, but a bright though small fire, and a few autumnal flowers in a glass on the chimney-piece, gave a pleasant aspect to the room. The evening, though oppressive, was damp, and the long threatening rain had begun to fall in a fine misty drizzle.

"If you'll take a seat, sir, my master will be here very soon. Daylight is nearly over, and they can't keep it up much longer. I'll light the gas if you like." "No, thank you; there is no need," returned

"No, thank you; there is no need," returned Brooke, throwing himself into a chair, for he felt weary—unaccountably weary. It was quite true, as he had said to Mrs. Harding, he was sorry he had promised to go to Scotland. He would much rather have migrated to Sefton Park to watch—what? He scarcely knew. The growth of an attachment which was in every way probable, suitable, and natural, between Stasie and young Pearson. Why did the idea haunt him? Was it possible that this young half-educated school-girl had so impressed herself on his fancy,—his imagination, his heart,—that it gave him a keen sense of annoyance to contemplate her probable marriage with another? He fell into a kind of nightmare-like reverie

from which he was roused by the entrance of his friend.

"Ah, Brooke, have you been sitting here long in the dusk? I was obliged to stay to the last. It's all over now, and I'm not sorry. I am dead beat. Every thing has gone off very well, but it's hard work" (hunting about for the matches). "The fattest, heaviest girls all insisted on swinging, and I had to swing them; and the little ones had a way of falling off the merry-go-rounds quite wonderful; my back ached picking them up. One little fellow nearly broke his arm, and his mother abused me vehemently. Come, you will like to wash your hands. I have a spacious house, but only four rooms furnished; in fact the first steps in life are very costly. I was fortunate, however, to attain my present position so early. It is a great thing to have a church of one's own; and though the rector, Mr. Dale, is quite old-fashioned in his ideas, he is glad of my help, and not averse to my influence, especially as I am quite independent of him."

And the young clergyman talked on as he conducted Brooke to his room, which had a bare barrack-like aspect. He was quite excited by the unusual pleasure of having a guest, and that guest his old and favorite

schoolfellow.

"The dinner will be quite ready, sir, in twenty minutes," said the grim female before mentioned, her head appearing above the kitchen stair. "I would not put

down the steak till you were safe in the house."

"Oh thank you, Mrs. Harris," said Robinson deferentially; "whenever you are ready we are." (To Brooke) "Most excellent person that cook of mine; my aunt, Mrs. Williams, placed her with me—she is quite invaluable, but a little short tempered."

"Then the Mr. Williams, who appears to be the presiding genius of Sefton Park, is some relation of yours?" asked Brooke, when they returned to the study.

"Yes, he is my cousin. His mother was my father's eldest sister. She has been really a good friend to me.

She is very well off, and naturally has a good deal of influence with her son, so she made him speak to the directors, and he got me this church. The emoluments are small, but they have given me this house, which is really quite a mansion; it is not as thoroughly well built as might be wished, and I am obliged to keep it in repair."

"I fancy they get nearly as much out of you as they give," said Brooke. "That cousin of yours evidently wishes to catch all the floating talent he can, and attach it to his rising colony. He wanted me to settle

here and create a practice."

"Did he?" cried Robinson, laughing. "I am afraid that would have been but a poor look-out. It is a most healthy locality and scarcely needs a physician; now, healthy or not, a 'curer of souls' is always needed, so there is more room for me than for you, Brooke."

"I cannot say Sefton Park has much temptation for me; indeed, I am strongly inclined to return to my

regiment."

"I dare say life is pleasant enough there; yet if you return you will never be any thing else but a military surgeon."

"True-"

"The dinner's ready," said, or rather snapped, Mrs. Harris, and Brooke did not finish his sentence. He followed his host into a very small room behind the study, which boasted little more than a table and chairs.

"You see I should feel quite lost in the real diningroom," said the young clergyman; "twenty people could dine there comfortably, and I often dine out, especially in summer when the Hardings are here; and this year Miss Stretton and Miss Verner, with Mr. Kharapet coming to and fro, make it quite lively."

The dinner, though very simple, was remarkably well cooked and served. Brooke was inwardly amused at the extreme politeness of the incumbent to his handmaid—he seemed quite grateful to her for cooking the dinner and putting it on the table, and any thing like an order was generally prefaced with "Don't

you think, Mrs. Harris," etc., etc.

When the meal was over and they returned to the study, the host said, "I know you would like a cigar—pray don't mind smoking; you will excuse me, it does not suit my cloth to be altogether as other men, but——" he paused.

"Come, Robinson, you don't mean to say that because you are a parson you must never indulge in a weed? Why, it is a most harmless bit of worldliness."

"Yes, I know; but you see my congregation have rather strict ideas, and—would you mind closing the shutters, Mrs. Harris?" as that individual appeared with the tea-tray. "I dare say the Morrisons are watching our shadows on the blind."

"There are three faces flat agen the windy-panes opposite," remarked Mrs. Harris in a deep, harsh, solemn voice, as she drew up the blind to fasten the

latch.

"Well, well, shut them out," said Robinson. "Really it is rather hard to have the inconveniences of town and country both."

"You may say so," said Mrs. Harris emphatically,

as she retired.

"After all," said Brooke, having lit his cigar, "I am not sure that Sefton Park is so healthy as to suit every one. Miss Verner, for instance,—she seemed to me when I first met her the incarnation of sound health, and I do not imagine she would have nearly fainted as she did to-day had she not been in a locality that in some way depressed her system. I don't understand it."

"Was she really almost gone?"

"Very nearly. She soon recovered, but-"

Brooke paused.

"She did a great deal both in preparing for the feast and helping at it. It may have been over fatigue;

she is always very good in helping, whether the poor or the sick, and I do not fancy she has much command of money, but she certainly has not a devotional spirit. She never comes to early service or any of the week-day services. Her aunt again has a great deal of piety; she would gladly attend all our services, but she is physically unequal to the exertion at that hour of the morning."

"Oh, indeed!"

"Mr. Kharapet, their great friend, is really a very interesting fellow. He is most anxious to inform himself as to the doctrines and practice of the Church of England. He is learned, too, in his way, and has more than once passed the night down here at Miss Stretton's in order to attend matins at seven o'clock. He always puts up at Miss Stretton's; he is her prime councillor."

"I know that," said Brooke, taking the cigar from his lips, and letting the blue smoke curl upwards. "Now tell me, Robby, have you seen much of this man, and what do you think of him, apart from his

taste for your morning service?"

"I understand the sneer, Brooke," said the young clergyman good humoredly. "Well, so far as I have been able to observe, I think he is a very worthy man, anxious to ascertain the truth, but cautious, and not too ready to jump to a conclusion. I have found it interesting to discuss some portions of the Old Testament with him. He knows Hebrew, and is of course at home in Syriac. He has certainly thrown new light upon some passages in the Prophet Isaiah."

"Then, you think him a sincere believer?"

"Yes, I do," with hesitation. "He says little about his beliefs or opinions, but he is anxious to be instructed in Anglican doctrine, and would gladly see some link established between the Nestorian and our own Church."

"He is a prime favorite with the Saintsbury

set.

"I know!" cried Mr. Robinson eagerly. "They got hold of him first. I cannot help imagining that had he fallen in with the orthodox party he would have been more favorably impressed. He is much pleased by the service even in that temporary metal erection."

"Suppose, Robby, you had a sister," began Brooke

after a pause.

"I have," returned his friend.

"Well, would you let your sister marry Khara-

pet?"

"I don't think I should object. He always has been a Christian, has been duly baptized, and is, I believe, very respectable,—nay, estimable. His manners are excellent; he is received into the best society, and will, I am inclined to think, develop into a sound churchman."

Brooke, with his little finger, flicked the ash contemptuously off his cigar. "I suppose you may be right. I know nothing against the man, but I have an invincible objection to him. I believe him to bewell, there is no use in airing my prejudices. Come, tell me something about yourself and your prospects, old fellow. You are infinitely too good to be pottering about here among a lot of pious women, young and old. You ought to have more stirring work to do."

"I am satisfied," said Robinson with a slight sigh.
"I am most worthily employed when doing the work

given to me with all my might."

"That is sound doctrine at any rate," returned Brooke thoughtfully, and the old acquaintances began to talk of past experiences and future hopes, time passing so rapidly that Brooke very nearly lost his train.

## CHAPTER XXII.

MRS. HARDING was faithful to her promise, and sent for the local doctor, more in obedience to Brooke's injunction than from any apprehensions of her own. It was not to be wondered at that heat and fatigue together had been too much for Stasie; and as she had hitherto been always perfectly well, any little indisposition was unlooked for and startling.

Stasie herself, though declaring she was quite right, and felt no remnant of weakness, was evidently not averse to see Dr. Hunter, whose advice had, she thought, already done Janet Mathews so much good.

Miss Stretton was much exercised respecting her niece. She was deeply concerned and warmly sympathetic, but, though she would have angrily denied the imputation, if any thing could have made her happier than she was at present, it would have been the necessity, or even the imaginary necessity, of dosing, watching, regulating, and coddling Stasie on the plea of delicate health.

The doctor's verdict, however, was comforting. "There isn't much the matter, Miss Verner—pulse a a little irregular, and general condition low. We must build you up. Did not sleep very well last night, you say? Ha? you generally sleep sound, I presume?"

"Oh yes! I never wake from the time I lay my head on the pillow till Susan rouses me; but the last three or four nights I have woke up often, though I

did not stay awake."

"Debility, nothing but debility. We will soon set you right. A simple tonic—a glass of port wine every morning about eleven; a small basin of strong beeftea, hot or cold as you like, before going to bed; light, nourishing diet—fish, game, underdone chop or steak, milk-pudding, not much vegetable, and no potatoes—you will observe, no potatoes."

"I am particularly fond of potatoes," urged Stasie.

"Renounce them for the present, my dear young lady. I will send up the tonic directly. Follow my directions as to diet, and you will soon be out of my hands."

"Very well," replied Stasie good-humoredly. "You are going to lose one patient as soon as you gain another. Miss Mathews returns home, I am sorry to say.

to-morrow."

The good old doctor, who was proud of his young patient's rapid improvement, which he considered due to his own skill more than to such accidents as change of air and congenial society, expressed proper regret, and hopes of seeing her again ere long, and was going to take leave when Miss Stretton exclaimed—"Before you go, doctor, I must really consult you about this mysterious pain in my left arm. It commences generally about the elbow, slowly ascends, increasing in torture every moment, passes through the shoulder, and culminates in my ear!"

"Very remarkable," said the doctor gravely.

"Perhaps you will just step into the dining-room and hear a more detailed account of the symptoms."

"Certainly, madam."

"I wonder auntie has not complained before," said Stasie to Janet, who had come in from the garden to say good-by to the doctor. "She must have suffered a great deal from what she says."

"Oh, I heard her complain two or three times, but I

did not mind much."

"She is rather funny about her complaints, yet I dare say she *does* suffer, poor soul. She has not had a very smooth life."

"Perhaps not; it is pretty smooth now."

"I hope so."

Though Stasie said she felt quite herself, she was aware of a weary, depressed sensation, against which she struggled earnestly, telling herself it was but laziness and a tendency to self-indulgence.

She therefore busied herself in assisting Janet to

pack up her belongings, adding some useful gifts to

that young lady's possessions.

Late in the afternoon Brooke appeared with Mrs. Harding, and made very particular inquiries as to Stasie's condition. Her report seemed to satisfy him, and after a short visit he departed, leaving an impression on Stasie that he was unusually silent and preoccupied.

"Of course I shall find you here on my return from

Scotland," he said, as he rose to take leave.

"Oh yes," replied Stasie. "I suppose we shall stay far into the winter, but not the whole of it. I want to go to town before Christmas; it will be very dull when Mrs. Harding leaves."

"We shalt not leave just yet," said that lady. "Mr.

Harding seems disposed to stay till November."

"I hope to find you more blooming than ever on my return," said Brooke, holding out his hand to Stasie. "So au revoir—not good-by."

"Au revoir," said Stasie pleasantly.

"Will you walk with me to the station?" asked Brooke of his cousin.

"Part of the way, at any rate," she returned.

They went away together, and Stasie stood on the doorsteps, where she had accompanied her friend, looking after them somewhat wistfully. She was conscious of a certain degree of sadness, of a sense of being left alone. Why had not Mrs. Harding asked her too to walk to the station? When should she see Brooke again? He talked of returning, but that was a mere chance.

She started at the consciousness of her own regret. This would not do. She ought to be ashamed of herself for thinking with regret about a man who, however nice and good, did not care one straw about her; she must not be weak and sentimental; she must impress him with the idea of her friendly indifference.

In this mood she gladly welcomed Mr. Robinson and Captain Pearson, both of whom called to inquire

for her, and spent an hour playing croquet with Janet and herself.

It was sunset when they left, and Stasie, throwing a shawl round her, went out to meet Mrs. Harding, who was passing with the children, whom she had met at the station "Are you quite well?" she asked, "you look white and tired."

"Yes, I am tired," she said hastily; "but I must not stop. Stasie. Tell Janet to come up and say good-by

to-morrow morning!" and she pressed on.

"May I never put my head in such a yoke!" thought Stasie, as she looked after her for a minute, and then turned to go in, when Bhoodhoo came from behind some rose bushes where he had been weeding.

He made a low salaam, raising his right hand to his

brow, with the dignified humility of an Eastern.

"The missee Sahib is well again?" he said in his soft broken English; "I so sorry, so frightened to hear she was sick."

"Thank you, Bhoodhoo, I am quite right to-day. I suppose I was over-tired. It was a nice treat for the children, was it not? You were a great help, I am

sure," she added kindly.

The man again salaamed and paused. "The missie Sahib is very good to Bhoodhoo—too good! It was nice, very nice feast; pleasant to see little babas eat and run about. If Kharapet Sahib were there, he very much pleased—he very kind good gentleman."

"Yes, he is very good to you; and, Bhoodhoo, you made me an excellent currie to-day. I like currie,

though no one else does!"

"Yes, missee, I eat up what missee left; de cook

and Mary say it is not good; foolish women."

"I will tell you what you shall do for us," said Stasie; "I will ask Mr. and Mrs. Harding, and you shall cook us an Eastern dinner."

The man's eyes sparkled. He was an artist in his way. "I sure to please the mem Sahib and Bhourra Sahib. I can make good dinner—very good—with

English dishes too. If missee Sahib will listen to me she will make me cook; woman cook no good; she know nothing; she use butter like that "—holding one hand about half a yard above the other, and "meat like that," putting them some two feet apart; "she is good herself, but she know no better; let me be cook, and missee will see she can eat well and not use half as much."

"You must talk of all that to Miss Stretton," said

Stasie, smiling; "I do not interfere."

"Ah, but the missee Sahib will let me speak; she

not angry?"

"Oh, no; but how will Susan like to be superseded—to have her place taken?" she added, seeing that

Bhoodhoo did not quite take in her meaning.

"She well pleased; does not like standing by fire; make her hot and red," said the man a little eagerly; "and I do not mind working a little in garden for missee, but that is not my work in my own country; another man make garden, but I have crossed the black water, and can do many things."

"Very well, Bhoodhoo, speak to Miss Stretton if

you like."

"Thank you, missee." The man stopped suddenly, as if keeping back some words, and Stasie left him still standing, as she walked into the house.

The next day was a sorry one to Janet, who had deeply enjoyed the many pleasures and, as it seemed to her, the luxuries of Sefton Park. Still, going back was not without its compensations. She was pleased to see "mothet" again, and, if lessons had not loomed in the near horizon, would have been less depressed.

Miss Stretton bore the separation with much equanimity. She was given to a slightly unreasonable jealousy of "those Mathews" and their claims upon Stasie. Her consciousness of her niece's honest, faithful affection for her early friends forced her to be very prudent in her expressions respecting them, which did not diminish the mental *virus*,

Now that Janet's visit was fairly over, she thought she would have Stasie all to herself, and see what could be done to further Kharapet's views. For her own part she would not have been sorry if Kharapet had betaken himself to his native land, and left her to enjoy the unexpected good fortune which had befallen her. But the Syrian gentleman had managed so to impress upon her an idea of his power, to serve or to injure her, that she never dreamed of disobeying him. Besides, he had managed to stir the last embers of expiring romance yet living in her somewhat starved imagination, and she really sympathized with what she considered his true and devoted attachment to Stasie. Miss Stretton was heartily on his side, and a little inclined to be peevish with her niece for not reciprocating his passion. Now that Janet was going away, she would have more opportunity of talking confidentially with, and influencing, Stasie. "Those Mathews" being somehow or other inimical in their effect, filling the dear child's head with silly notions of her own independence.

Miss Stretton was therefore most amiable and thoughtful in her provision for Janet's journey, and threw herself so heartily into the packing-up of some dainties in the shape of game and preserves, etc., for Mrs. Mathews, that Stasie, who vibrated with unerring responsiveness to the lightest discordant or sympathetic

touch, was quite drawn to her aunt.

Though scarcely a companion, yet Janet Mathews was a loss to Stasie.

She brought an atmosphere of youthful, healthy life into the quiet house. Stasie missed her noisy ascents and descents of the stairs, the necessity of calling out, "Do shut the door, Janet," followed by a reckless

slam; she also missed the demands on her time and patience—she now had nothing to do but to sit down and read or study music, or please herself in any way she liked. She was not discontented, nor was she content. But she did not sit down and indulge in morbid fancies, she went out and in, and tried to speak French with Mademoiselle, to help Mrs. Harding with her needlework (for Mr. Harding expected his children to be smart, at the smallest possible cost), to help Mr. Robinson with the poor, and make Aunt Clem consent to entertain him and Mr. and Mrs. Harding at dinner. This was a tremendous exertion, but a great success; Bhoodhoo covered himself with honor, and fixed his position as a "cordonbleu."

Mr. Harding, who was in the highest good humor, as usual with him when eating and drinking at other people's expense, declared that Bhoodhoo must come and show his cook how to boil rice, for it was an extraordinary fact that no Englishwoman could accomplish

that simple operation successfully.

Having found his way to Sefton Park, Mr. Pearson soon became familiar with the road, sometimes making a visit to Mrs. Harding, his ostensible motive, but often coming direct to Limeville with a book, or some original composition of the regimental bandmaster's for Miss Verner to try over, or, in short, some mature rendering of "An apple or a cherry, or a new invented game" of the old ballad.

"I declare, here is that Mr. Pearson again," cried Miss Stretton the day after their dinner party, "and I have not changed my dress—so early too! I suppose he expects luncheon! Stasie, dear, I must run away—

you do not mind!"

"Not in the least! but, auntie, you need not run away. Your wrapper is very pretty; you look quite

nice."

But Miss Stretton was gone! and enter Mr. Pearson, slight, graceful, in a dark, admirably-fitting shooting-jacket, perfectly attired at all points, mustaches

carefully trimmed, bright laughing eyes, mien of a a conqueror, perfectly, yet pleasantly, pleased with himself.

"Hope you will forgive me for calling so early,

Miss Verner?"

"I am glad to see you," said Stasie simply and

truthfully.

"The fact is," resumed Mr. Pearson, "I am on duty to-day and must return early. To-morrow I am going down to Southsea for a day or two, so you see I cannot come again till next week."

"Do not apologize," returned Stasie, laughing.
"You are very good, Miss Verner," settling himself comfortably into a deep armchair. "What have you been doing since I saw you? How is the Parson?

dangerous fellows these parsons!"

"Are they?" returned Stasie, opening her workbasket and taking out a little print frock she was making for the child of a poor widow, her favorite protégée. "I don't know much about parsons, except Mr. Robinson, and I am very fond of him!"

"Poor Robinson! It is rather annihilating to a man when a young lady says openly, 'I am very fond

of him!""

"I do not think Mr. Robinson would mind. I flatter

myself he is very fond of me."

"That is exceedingly probable," said the gallant Lancer. "I dare say you find it is a general tendency among your friends."

"I am not sure."

"What are you making, Miss Verner? is it-is ita chair-cover?"

"No, Mr. Pearson," said Stasie, laughing; "it is a

little girl's frock."

"Ah! I see—a Dorcas concern. I had a sister who went in for that sort of thing—she was in love with a parson then; but I don't think she was a first hand. The mothers complained she didn't give the right cut; the frocks were not in the last fashion."

"My poor people know nothing of fashion; they

are very thankful for any thing they can get."

"Well! my sister cut the whole concern—quarreled with the parson, threw over the women and babies, and married a cavalry colonel old enough to be her father; he had been awfully fast, but they are as happy as a pair of doves, and she is never at home except when she receives."

"That was certainly a change."

"I am going to stay with her for a garden party and something else. I wish you were coming, Miss Verner."

"Thank you. So do I."

"If we had only thought of it—it might have been so easily managed. You must be awfully dull here!"

"No; not so dull as you might think. But I do

not intend to stay here always."

"I should think not! What do you say to a little riding? My second charger is uncommonly safe and steady, and I should be only too glad if you'd try him. Do, Miss Verner! My man could bring over the horses early of a morning, and let them rest, and I could come later, in time to give you a lesson (I think you said you have never ridden). We could manage it three times a week. In a month I am certain you would be quite at home on horseback. Do, Miss Verner."

"It would be perfectly delicious!" cried Stasie, laying down her work and gazing at him with spark-

ling eyes.

Mr. Pearson's said very plainly that he thought any thing shared with her would be delicious, but his reply was cut short by the entrance of Miss Stretton, who reappeared in all the glories of her afternoon costume.

She was dignified, and not too gracious; but young Pearson was sweetly respectful. He rose with *empressement*; he drew forward a chair, he sought for a footstool, he inquired with every mark of interest after her health—and his reward was that Miss Stretton said

somewhat icily: "As you are so early, Mr. Pearson,

perhaps you will stay to lunch?"

"Oh yes, Aunt Clem!" cried Stasie, somewhat scandalized at this inhospitable invitation. "Of course Mr. Pearson will stay to lunch; do you know, he is so kind as to say he will lend me a horse and come and teach me how to ride."

"Rather you will have the kindness to accept my

teaching."

"Ahem! very kind indeed," said Miss Stretton, dryly.

"Do you think we could manage it, auntie? It would be so delightful, and do me so much good, for really I have never felt quite—quite myself since that day I fainted; I get so dizzy, and my heart beats sometimes as if it would burst—only, you know, for a moment or two."

"Certain horse exercise would set you up!" ex-

claimed the Lancer.

"My dear Stasie," with a slightly shocked air, "an instant's reflection will show you the impossibility of such a scheme, unconnected as you are by any relationship with Mr. Pearson; you could not ride about without a chaperon. If Mrs. Harding could accompany you, or Mr. Kharapet—"

"Kharapet!" repeated Mr. Pearson. "By Jove! fancy him on horseback! He would want an arm-

chair and a pair of slipper-stirrups."

Miss Stretton grew red with vexation; Stasie laughed good-humoredly. "I rather think Mr. Kharapet must know how to ride; how else could he get about in his country?"

"Well, he does not look like it. But, I am sure, I have no objection if he will get a mount and come with us. Why won't you come yourself, Miss Stretton? I am sure you would look stunning on horseback."

Miss Stretton drew herself up; she fancied the gay Lancer was amusing himself at her expense. Stasie gave him a private warning look, to his great delight, as it seemed to establish an understanding between them. "I wonder if Mr. Kharapet and Mr. Harding would let me have a horse of my own? I am sure they might," to Pearson.

"I should think so."

"My dear Stasie, a horse for you would involve a second for a groom, and an infinitude of trouble," cried Miss Stretton.

"Yes, yes; you had much better use mine, Miss Verner; and you must be awfully bored in this hole—"

"I do not think that is very polite, Mr. Pearson,"

said Miss Stretton, bridling.

"Isn't it? I am sure I am very sorry," began Mr. Pearson, when the sound of a bell announced luncheon.

Miss Stretton was sorely disturbed by this visit and daring proposition. She was afraid to speak to Stasie, who was tolerably persevering in her fancies; and when she had mentioned the matter to Mrs. Harding that lady had not seemed at all surprised, simply remarking it would be a great treat for Stasie.

"But, my dear Mrs. Harding! if we allow this young man to come here constantly, the next thing will

be a proposal for my dearest niece."

"Well, Miss Stretton, young Mr. Pearson is quite unobjectionable; and it is well that Stasie should see other men than Mr. Kharapet and Dr. Brooke, though I do not fancy she intends to commit matrimony for some time. She wisely wishes to see something, and enjoy something of life before she plunges into its cares. Let us leave her to herself, poor child!"

"Yet—alone as she is in the world, dear Mrs. Harding—would it not be well if she were settled safely with a kind protector, a good husband, like that kind

and excellent Mr. Kharapet?"

"Who?" said Mrs. Harding sharply. Then, returning to her usual tone, she continued with an air of

indifference, "Provided the husband was a protector,

not a robber,-yes."

No more was then said, but Miss Stretton mused over Mrs. Harding's words till she worked herself into a virtuous rage. "She wants the dear sweet girl for that cousin of hers," thought Aunt Clem, "when she knows he is attached to herself! It is too infamous! She would just dictate every thing in their house and out of it! I shall never forget the tone of his voice the day I overheard them talking. I don't suppose it is any thing more than one of your sentimental friendships, that is half a love affair, still it is very reprehensible; and I dare say, if we knew but all, we would find poor Mr. Harding has enough to put up with! I am sure I always find him frank and friendly."

The worst suspicions gathered darkly and unresisted before the spinster's sharpened vision, giving her ample food for reflection, which was not without a degree of

pleasurable excitement.

Some days passed, however, and the obnoxious Lancer did not make his appearance. Miss Stretton's uneasiness became therefore less keen; but her anxiety for Mr. Kharapet's return increased; it was tiresome of him to stay away so long, and foolish too. Certainly Stasie was more settled and stay-at-home the last few days, not always flying after Mrs. Harding. It was as

well she should learn to do without her!

These reflections had been mingling with and somewhat marring Miss Stretton's efforts to make up the week's accounts, always a severe trial to her temper; for Aunt Clem was an indifferent financier, and found it extremely difficult to keep within any given sum. while she firmly believed that she owed it to herself to make some private savings from the house allowance. At present, however, things went better, and Bhoodhoo's administration was decidedly economical.

At length she put away her books and went into the drawing-room, where the lamp was lit and the night

shut out, for the evening meal was over,

She found Stasie lying on the sofa, a light shawl round her shoulders, and a big book in her hand.

"My dear, it is something wonderful to see you lying

down! Don't you feel well?"

"Not exactly. I felt very weary and dizzy all yesterday and to-day. I suppose it is the autumn. They say that spring and autumn are trying. This evening I am chill and tired, so I lay down."

"My darling Stasie, I feel quite uneasy. You must

see Dr. Hunter to-morrow."

"Nonsense, auntie! I am not bad enough for that. I shall be all right to-morrow. I hate taking medicine, and those bottles of his have not done one bit of

"Still, my dear, if you are not better to-morrow,

I must call in Dr. Hunter."

"Very well, Aunt Clem; I shall be much better to-morrow."

"I trust you will, my love," said Aunt Clem, roaming rather aimlessly about the room. "I wonder where Mary can have put my work? I know I laid it on that little table by the window before tea, and I had just two or three sprigs to finish of the pattern."

"Perhaps she put it in your basket," suggested Stasie. "Not she! it never would occur to her to put it in

the right place. But perhaps it would be better not to work by lamp-light; my eyes are far from strong. I

will just finish the paper."

Miss Stretton drew up the easiest of the easy-chairs close to the table, and settled herself for an exhaustive examination of the morning paper. So Stasie was left awhile uninterrupted to her studies. But this could not last long. Aunt Clem generally found the presence of a companion an irresistible temptation to speech.

"What are you reading, Stasie?" "The history of civilization."

"Isn't it rather dry for you, my love? Perhaps trying to understand it may have helped to make you dizzy?"

"No. I do not think so. There are bits I am too ignorant to take in quite, but on the whole it is immensely interesting. It seems to open my eyes. How miserably ill-educated I am!"

"I do not agree with you, Stasie. You certainly have not had first-rate masters, but you know quite as much as most young ladies, and you are coming on

nicely with your music."

Stasie made no reply, and silence reigned till it grew oppressive-to Miss Stretton at least. She looked at the volume in her niece's hand for a few moments, seeking in her memory to clear some dim association from the mists which wrapped it. At last she caught the idea:

"Stasie, dear! is that the book Mr. Robinson said

was decidedly atheistic in its tendencies?"

"It is, Aunt Clem."

"Then why will you persist in reading it against the advice of your spiritual director? Depend upon it, this kind of literature is most pernicious. You really ought to give it up."

"I do not think it does me any harm," said Stasie wearily; "and Mr. Robinson only said it was written by a skeptic; he did not advise me against it. I

should not have minded if he had."

"My dear child, I fear you have rather a rebellious

spirit! At your age you need guidance."
"Yes, I dare say I do. If Mr. Robinson said the book was bad, or coarse, or any thing like that, I would never have looked at it, but—" She stopped,

and began to read again.

"Well, at your age, Stasie, I would have trembled at the thought of an irreligious book! I composed some prayers myself at the age of twelve, and always taught in a Sunday-school, of course the style of thing that was then the fashion. I mean," correcting herself rapidly, "the present refined and elevated tone of religious conviction had not developed, and the individual was left more to her own resources-to wander, perhaps! We had less of the spiritual guidance, the personal care which is so soothing and improving

under the High Church system."

Finding that Stasie neither listened nor replied, Miss Stretton ceased, and dipped into the evidence in an interesting case of robbery and murder; but, after a while, Stasie, in her turn, interrupted her aunt by speaking suddenly:

"Will you give me the card that is lying on the table near you, auntie, please; I want to mark the place; I am sure Dr. Brooke will explain this to me when he

comes back."

"Why not apply to your natural guide, Mr. Robinson, or that really good and learned man, Mr. Kharapet?"

"Neither of them know half as much as Dr Brooke,

and he is very good, too."

"Ahem! we really know very little of Dr. Brooke,"

said Miss Stretton stiffly.

Stasie did not heed. She read on, but presently put down her book and closed her eyes. Aunt Clem, observing this, softly laid down her paper to avoid the noise of its rustling. She sat awhile in thought, and then, with a glance at the sleeper, drew a pack of cards from her pocket and began to shuffle them for some moments with an earnest fixed look in her eyes; she then cut them several times, and proceeded to spread them out in rows. She was so absorbed in this occupation she did not notice that Stasie had moved restlessly and opened her eyes. She was therefore considerably startled when her niece exclaimed, "What are you doing, auntie? playing patience? Why don't you take up the cards?"

"Well, it is not exactly patience," returned Miss Stretton with slight embarrassment; "it is a different sort of game—in short, I learned it from a dear old French lady who was staying in the same pension with us in Paris—oh, a long time ago; she had been taught by the celebrated Mademoiselle Le Norman. I suppose

you know who she was?"

"The fortune-teller they say Napoleon—the first Napoleon—used to consult."

"Exactly."

"Then are you telling your own fortune, auntie?"
"No—that is, there isn't much to foresee about my-

"No—that is, there isn't much to foresee about myself. Thanks to you, dear child, I hope I have seen the last of my troubles; but I was just trying to get an idea of when Mr. Kharapet would come back."

"But you don't believe in this fortune telling," cried Stasie, getting off her sofa and coming over to the

table.

"Oh no," said Miss Stretton, "of course not, no one does, you know; but it is amusing, and it is really

curious how things turn out sometimes."

"If I were to be superstitious," said Stasie, kneeling down on a large footstool and resting her elbows on the table, "I should prefer astrology to cards—there is something grand and fanciful in having a star presiding over one's fortunes—but these bits of paste-board——"

"Yet people—men of commanding intellect—have deigned to consult them," put in Miss Stretton gravely, as her niece paused; "and I have myself seen wonderfully clear at times. Of course it is all nonsense," she went on quickly, seeing a sparkle of fun in Stasie's eyes, "and (gathering up the cards) they shall not offend your superior sense; let us put them away."

"No, no, auntie dear," cried Stasie, catching her hand. "Was I rude? Forgive me. I should like to see how you do it. Won't you tell my fortune,

auntie?"

"I think, my love, you are a very persuasive child; but if you have a fault, dear, it is preferring your own youthful judgment to the experience—the maturer opinions of your elders."

"I am afraid I do think too much of myself," said Stasie reflectively. "Come now, Aunt Clem, do tell

me my fortune!"

"If I do, you must never say one word to Mrs.

Harding; she is one of your cold intellectual women, who despise such little pastimes, for I need not tell

you that it is a mere amusement."

"Oh yes; nothing more of course," returned Stasie, struggling to keep the corners of her mouth in order, for she perceived that it was in reality any thing but play to her aunt. "And, trust me, I shall never say one word to any one."

"Very well; now take the cards and shuffle them; now cut nine times. No, leave them there; I will take

them up."

Having done so, Miss Stretton cut them once more, glanced rapidly at the card turned up, and replaced them. Then she proceeded to lay them out in rows of nine, till the pack (from which she had extracted the smaller cards) was exhausted. Stasie watched with amused curiosity, while Miss Stretton, gazing intently on the cards, her lips moving as though repeating something to herself, kept silence for a minute or two, and then exclaimed impressively: "It is really quite remarkable, and as plain—as plain as I see you, Stasie!"

"What is plain, Aunt Clem?"

"There is a dark man—a very dark man—at a distance, whose thoughts are all about you, making arrangements at this moment to come back to you."

"Can you see all that?" cried Stasie, smiling. "Has

he a portmanteau, or only a traveling bag?"

"Ah! you may laugh, but I see it quite clear. He

is a long way off, but not across water."

"Can you not see the name of the place?" asked Stasie, whose pale cheek began to show a little warmth, and her eyes lit up.

"No, no; that is expecting too much," and, slyly, if the cards speak truth, you too are thinking of his

return."

"Then it is Mr. Pearson," said Stasie. "I shall be very pleased indeed to see him back."

Miss Stretton shook her head. "He is clubs," said

she sagely. "The man who is thinking of you is spades;" she paused. "I cannot make it out. There is some danger threatening you from a dark man and a woman, some one very much interested in you, it cannot be me; let me see." She touched one or two cards, murmuring something. "Yes," she resumed, "a club woman."

"Can you see when we are to start on our travels,

aunt?"

"No; but I think you will go far away. Stop, Stasie, I want to try this again. That other dark man and the club lady are very much mixed up together, and fond of one another. Could it be Dr. Brooke and Mrs. Harding?"

"I dare say; they are very fond of each other."

"Why, have you observed that?" exclaimed Miss Stretton with emphasis.

"Of course, I know they were dear friends in their

early days and relations."

"That may be, still it is not right, and must be rather

trying to poor Mr. Harding."

"What are you talking about, Aunt Clem?" cried Stasie flushing crimson. "What in the world is there 'trying' to Mr. Harding in Dr. Brooke's friendship with his wife? What possible harm can there be?

what offense in such friendship?"

"Ah! my dear child, don't fly into a rage. You have not seen as much of the world as I have; and," shaking her head, "though I don't suppose Mrs. Harding thinks much about it, at least I should hope not, I know he is very much attached to her, and that sort of thing is imprudent and really immoral."

"How do you know he is so much attached to her?"

asked Stasie, struck by her aunt's certainty.

"Oh! I can see it quite well. And men of Dr. Brooke's stamp, wanderers, men used to camps and the wild ways of military companions, they have really no principle worth mentioning; and if Mrs. Harding interests him, and I know she does, why——"

"Aunt Clem, I am certain you wrong Dr. Brooke. He gives me the idea of an upright honorable man.

How is it that you are so convinced?"

"Well, dear, I heard something by the merest accident. I would never breathe it to a soul but yourself, for indeed I am truly interested in that dear little Mrs. Harding," began Miss Stretton suddenly, imagining that she had hit on the best possible means of lowering or altering Stasie's esteem for Brooke, who was by no means a favorite with the gentle spinster.

"What did you hear?" cried Stasie, almost quivering with indignant eagerness, as Miss Stretton paused.

"You remember that Sunday, the day they found out that you had given away your jewels?" Stasie nod-ded. "Well, you remember you asked me to go down and see if they were all gone, the gentlemen I mean. When I went in they, Mrs. Harding and Dr. Brooke, were talking so earnestly they never heard me, and before I could say a word or make a noise in any way I heard Dr. Brooke say, 'You know there is nothing I would not do for you. I would lay down my life for you,' and with that he kissed her hand several times. It was not the words only, Stasie, but the voice; I could not describe it. I would not believe that cold, stiff man could have spoken so tenderly, so softly, had I not heard him."

Stasie again flushed, but her color died quickly away. "And what did they say when they saw you?"

she asked.

"They did not see me, dear; it would have been too awkward. I just slipped out of the room, made a noise

with the door-handle, and came back again."

"You should have staid," said Stasie gravely, "and they would have explained it. I cannot believe that either feel any thing but sincere regard and friendship for each other. I am sure I wish poor dear Mrs. Harding had married Dr. Brooke; she would have been ever so much happier. There, don't let us talk any more about it, and do put such suspicions out of

your mind; they are base, unjust, unworthy. There,

go on with my fortune, do, auntie."

"I must say, Stasie, you allow yourself to speak most unguardedly, with a degree of heat which is neither lady-like nor respectful. Were I wealthy and independent you would not address me in such a tone." Miss Stretton pressed her handkerchief to her eyes: this was an unfailing device.

"You know you are quite wrong," cried Stasie, jumping up and turning her aunt's face forcibly to her. "I'd say twice as much if you were, I wish you had ten thousand a year, that I might abuse you heartily, for I am very, very angry. Mind, I don'tbelieve you are right, not a bit; and yet you have made me uncom-

fortable."

"Well, my dear, time will show; I shall be very glad to know I am wrong. As to the cards, I see there is one man, a very dark man, truly and devotedly attached to you, and he will soon be here. I am sorry to say I also see a great deal of trouble and worry and confusion, from which a faithful female friend will help to save you, and then there is nothing clear except the devotion of this king of spades, whose thoughts follow

you every where "

"And is this muddle all you can make out, auntie?" said Stasie, rising from her footstool, to which she had returned. "I suppose the devoted friend is yourself, and I see quite well this ugly king of spades you intend to represent is Hormuz Kharapet. If so, I shall tell you the end of the fortune myself. My trouble will be to make you well and strong and able to travel, in which you will help. As to Hormuz, he may think what he likes, but beyond the power law gives him to dole out my money by driblets, he shall never have any thing to do with me or my affairs once I get them into my own hands. So good-night, Aunt Clem."

## CHAPTER XXIII.

NEARLY three weeks had elapsed since Dr. Brooke had appeared at Sefton Park. During this time life flowed as usual, smooth and unruffled, in that modern Arcadia, yet Mrs. Harding was aware of a distinct change in her husband from the comparatively sunny mood which had rendered the first months in their summer quarters unusually easy and even cheerful to her.

He suddenly ceased to take any interest in the garden, in the pigs, in the poultry, or even the completion of the fowl-house—that *chef d'œuvre* which had emanated from his own brain. He no longer returned early from town to harass the gardener, to worry the nondescript caretaker of the ponies and horse, who was a mixture of groom and odd man, to tramp about the fields devising how "rights of way" might be stopped, and the hedge-rows converted into gold yielding sites for villas. He no longer came in healthily fatigued at night to amuse himself by elaborate calculations of how much the pigs—principally fed by refuse from the house—would stand him per pound when killed, cured, and ready for the table, or the value of the eggs produced under the same conditions.

He now returned by the last train, and sometimes missed that, leaving Mrs. Harding to form what conjectures she liked rather than incur the cost of a telegram. And when he did return, he growled less about his food, and was less keen in noticing specks on the plate. Occasionally he was furiously impatient, but on the whole less oppressively exacting than usual; besides this he ate less, and did not seem to care what he ate, a sign of disturbance more serious than any

thing his wife had ever before observed.

She felt sure that something serious had affected him, yet she did not like to ask what. There was no attempt at confidence between them. He was a harsh, over-bearing taskmaster, and she a silent, submissive,

but deeply resentful slave.

Even when a kindly feeling exists between husband and wife, a thoughtful woman will hesitate to put questions which may only trouble a husband already wearied with care, the answers, to which she perhaps could not understand, and the difficulties which they reveal she cannot help to disentangle. Often a truly sympathetic wife wisely waits for a confidence to be

given, which it would be useless to force.

Still Mrs. Harding's was not a nature that could look with indifference on signs of suffering even in one who had inflicted so much on herself. When not stirred into active but impotent anger, her mental attitude towards her husband was that of indifference, tinged with contempt. She had long striven to win him: it was long before she could believe that all the delicate nostrums she had heard and read of for the cure of brutal, selfish, tyrannical husbands-affection. forbearance, submission, patience and the like, were fruitless, unavailing-before she learned the bitter lesson that there are men with whom stinging selfassertion and unhesitating displays of coarse ill-temper do more than all the refined self-control of the most gracious gentlewoman. But these were weapons unfitted to her hand, while the means supposed to be infallible only served to put her under the feet of her savage lord. Now her sole hope was to keep a certain exterior decency in their home. The thought of quitting it, of freeing herself from the almost intolerable degradation of her life, never crossed her brain. She lived for her children; she knew the cruel penalties that awaited a separated wife, and the family thus sundered; nor had she the legal right to complain. No, endurance only was all left to her, and she resolved to endure.

But at present she felt anxious about Mr. Harding; nothing save money troubles could affect him, she felt sure, and these would touch her little ones. She felt

even disposed to question her husband, but that the dread of a rude rejoinder kept her silent. At length, one evening, Mr. Harding having sent away his dinner nearly untouched, and asked his wife to mix him a third tumbler of brandy and water, she ventured to speak. "You do not seem well—you have scarcely eaten, and I do not think it can be good for you to take such an unusual amount of spirits."

"Don't bother about that! I feel to want it. No, I am not quite the thing, and I have had a thundering big bill for those new curtains we got for York Gate house last spring. It's infamous! Just look here," drawing a long envelope out of his breast-pocket, "sixty pounds, by George! There must be some in-

famous imposition somewhere!"

Mrs. Harding took the account and looked over it. "I do not think we can object to any of the items," she said. "I remember we agreed to almost all this when we ordered the curtains."

"Ay, just so! that's right. Always stand up for every thing that can drag money out of your husband's

pocket!"

This was a style of answer to which Mrs. Harding was well accustomed, but the tone was unusual,—not angry and contemptuous,—rather dejected and querulous, as if he were the victim of a virago. She could not help smiling.

"I am sorry you have such a large sum to pay, but I fear it will be useless to dispute any thing. However, I have no doubt these people will wait till it is

convenient to you---"

"Ay, but when will it be convenient? Don't suppose I am going to get richer, nothing of the kind! Give me my cigar-case, will you."

A silence ensued, while Mr. Harding cut off the end of his cigar, lit it, and took a few preliminary

puffs.

Then in the same subdued manner he said reflectively, "I wish you had had some money, my dear."

Mrs. Harding was more than astonished at this different setting of an old tune. He must have some great trouble on his mind, she thought, and answered gently-

"I wish I had, John, if it could be of any use to

vou."

"Money is always of use," he returned with a heavy sigh. "You ain't a bad creature, Livy—I always said so—but too careless, too regardless of my interests-I who have done every thing for you, and

made you what you are!"

Mrs. Harding looked up from her work and made no reply beyond a smile. Her husband having puffed in silence for a minute, she said: "Have you had any loss? I do not wish to worry you for details, but if you want to reduce our outlay, say so, and I will do my best."

Mr. Harding groaned. "That's the mischief of it. Don't you think you could do on fifteen pounds a month less and not make any material difference?"

"That is quite out of the question, but we might live very comfortably on much less than we do by at-

tempting less."

"Ay, that's just like you. You have no regard for appearances. How would it do to stay on here till after Christmas?"

"I should have no objection, and it would certainly be an economy; only I fear the old house would be neither warm nor dry."

"I will see about it. The fact is, I have been shamefully plundered-shamefully, by a dashed infernal fellow who pretended to be my friend."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Harding, infinitely surprised. To err by overtrust in another was not one

of her husband's usual characteristics.

"I hope to make up for it in time, but at present I would be glad if you would take the trouble to be very, very careful, Livy, as careful as you can be without making any visible change. 'Drawing in' damages a man's credit."

"I will do my best," returned Mrs. Harding, struck by his unusual amiability and the fact that he called her "Livy," for he rarely gave her any name. She thought she would make an attempt to establish a better tone between them. "In any case I will do my best," she resumed after an instant's pause; "and as we are talking confidentially, don't you think you could manage to forgive me my want of fortune? would be much better for us all. You yourself would be more comfortable if you were not constantly in a state of resentful irritation against me. Of course my want of fortune is exceedingly provoking, but you see the law does not allow you to repudiate me on that account. If it did, I should not, of course, have a word to say; as it is, suppose we make the best of each other for the children's sake. Suppose you take the trouble to speak as politely to me as you do to-Jane, for instance, I think you would find matters go smoother."

Harding listened with a good deal of surprise, not so much at the words as at the quiet, resolute accent with which they were spoken. He was too coarse, too morally blind, to perceive the depth of indifference, the absence of all regard which enabled his wife to

speak as she did.

"I don't think I ever heard you talk so sensibly before," he said. "I am sure I always try to be a good
husband, and you want for nothing. But you must
see it is hard on a man when all the expenses come
out of one purse, and I must say you do not show that
keen regard for my interest I have a right to expect.
You are a curious creature, Livy. You don't care for
appearances, and yet you do not care to hold money."

"I wish you could see that there is no real gain in trying to beat down prices below the market value, nor in underpaying the services of those you employ. Nevertheless, I will do my very best, as I said, only never expect me to get thirty shillings' worth out of a

sovereign."

"You know that's ----- nonsense," interjected her

"One word more, John," continued Mrs. Harding, her courage growing as she spoke. "Put a little restraint on your own impulses, your habit of crushing me with outbursts of contemptuous anger. I have grown used to them, and think I have tried silence long enough. The next time you speak in this objectionable way, why—I shall answer."

Mr. Harding stared at his wife, and she met his eye steadily, gravely without the least anger or defiance.

"I'm sure I don't know what you are talking about," he said peevishly. "I only want to do the best I can for us all. I wish you didn't take those crochets into your head. When a man has been working his heart out for his wife and family, he can't always be expected to be as smooth as silk."

"Perhaps not," returned Mrs. Harding calmly; "but try and distribute your ruggedness impartially."

He did not reply, and silence fell upon them both. Mrs. Harding's heart beat fast. Had she indeed won the key of the position. It was a great point to have been able without noise to show her husband something of what she felt, and now she must nail her colors to the mast!

After draining his tumbler, Mr. Harding, speaking

as if out of his thoughts, exclaimed-

"Kharapet is back again. He was at the office to-day."

"I suppose we shall see him here to-morrow then?"
"Yes, he said he would come down, and I asked

him to dinner, the --- sneak."

"I thought you were on very good terms," said Mrs. Harding with surprise, "but I confess I never liked him."

"Yes, I know that, and he knows it, and I beg you will not show it so plainly. It does not suit me to be on bad terms with the fellow. Moreover it would be a bad business for Stasie Verner if the two executors

could not act together! In short, Livy, you must not give Kharapet the cold shoulder—not at present, at least; he is a queer customer."

"I shall never be rude to him, but I cannot be cor-

dial."

"Well, well, don't look at him as if he were dirt."

Mrs. Harding laughed, and soon after her husband declared himself too dead beat to keep out of bed any longer.

Brooke was half surprised and half amused at the impatience with which he looked forward to the end of his visit in the Highlands. His hosts were kind and cordial, he had a fair amount of sport, and occasionally met very pleasant people. Amongst them pretty lively mondé girls, to whom he made himself agreeable; so agreeable, indeed, that he was pressed to visit more than one house. Business of importance, however, obliged him to return to London, he said, and there he duly arrived little more than a fortnight after he had left it. He resisted the temptation to run down to Sefton Park the very next day, and busied himself about some commissions for his brother and the friends he had just left. But he was none the less haunted by the vivid memory of Stasie Verner who, from the first, had made a deeper impression on his senses than he was aware. He had but to close his eyes and she was before them; the round, rich, graceful figure, the large earnest eyes, so variable in expression, and the mouth so sweet, so proud, so scornful, as the passing temper of the moment moved her; above all, the subtle fascination of believing there was a secret sympathy between them threw its glamor over him.

And he had misjudged her! He had been so dull, so low in mind, as to suppose that a creature frank and noble, a woman capable of forming a high ideal, would have stooped to a miserable flirtation with a creature like Bob Mathews! and have had the

effrontery to write to himself, a stranger, to shield her clandestine amour! How gallantly, too, she stood to her guns, when the moment of discovery came! A girl of such caliber could love, ay, well! truly passionately! Why should he not try to win that love! But he was so much older than this bright young creature, who was full to the lips with life! a grave somber fellow too! who had none of the gallant graces that charm women, only an earnest heart, that could be kind and true, and, he began to suspect, passionately loving!

Of course Dr. Brooke did not sit down and dream like a sentimental girl. But such thoughts flashed through his mind at the most unlikely times, always

more or less vivid and enticing.

Still he was no foolish boy to let go the reins of his self control or show his hand too soon, and it was not till the fourth day after his return from Scotland that he permitted himself to take the train for Sefton Park, and present himself to his cousin.

She received him with all the more cordiality as she expected to see Kharapet, when the door opened to

admit him.

"I did not think you would come back so soon," she said, after they had exchanged greetings. thought Scotland and the moors would have too much attraction to be left."

"They are pleasant, but I wanted to be in London for a while; it has all the interest of a possible future abode to me. And how has every thing been going

on since I went away?"

"Just as usual, for myself better than usual. I am trying to follow your good advice. Oh! what an idiot I have been!"

"I am afraid you have," said Brooke, laughing. "And how is your friend Miss Verner?"

"Very well—that is, not quite well. I do not think she has been so well since the day of the school treat, though she does not admit it. I imagine she is not quite so bright, so energetic. You must notice her and tell me what you think. She is looking well

enough."

"Then we will hope she is well!" After some talk about the children, a topic on which, though not diffuse, Mrs. Harding always had something to say, Brooke asked, "And what news of the gentle Kharapet?"

Mrs. Harding laughed. "He is to dine here to-day. I am amused that both of you should make your appearance simultaneously! like the good and evil heroes of a drama, ready to counteract each other! Mr. Kharapet has been away at Lord Saintsbury's and elsewhere ever since you were here."

"I presume, as he comes from such saintly quarters, Kharapet is the good hero, and I am the impersona-

tion of worldliness and wrong."

"Ah, Jim, if I can only gather strength to follow your counsels, I shall consider you my good genius."

"Have you been bullying Harding?"

"No, not exactly," smiling, "but finding him in a melting mood (I am afraid he has met with losses), I ventured to speak out with some effect. He listened, and only gently reproached me with my want of fortune and general incompetence, so I warned him that in future if he did not refrain from bursts of savage anger against me, before the children and the general public, I would answer accordingly. I think I could, if I once nerved myself to the effort. I dare say he will forget what I said, but I will, if I can be true to myself, recall it to his memory on the first occasion."

"Stick to that, Livy," exclaimed Brooke earnestly, and it will be better for you both. Men respect strength in women; it produces an immense effect on our say, lower nature. It is a virtue you should as-

sume even if you have it not."

"Il ne faut jamais faire agir un homme dans un sens différent de son charactère," quoted Mrs. Harding. "How is weekness to assume streeth?"

ing. "How is weakness to assume strength?"

"I suspect there is more strength in you than you are aware of; be brave, courage comes with exercise."

After a little more talk, and an interview with Ethel and Willie, who were going out to walk, Mrs. Harding proposed paying Stasie and Miss Stretton a visit. "I will leave with you," she continued, "then you can tell me what you think, for very probably I am all wrong in my ideas."

"Is Robinson at home?" asked Brooke.

"Yes, he is always at his post, as busy and energetic as ever. What a good, earnest little man he is! He would be ever so much happier in some miserable crowded East End parish. He frets at being in what

he considers the lap of luxury here."

"I must say it is rather a waste to expend one's energies preaching to a congregation of respectable old women of both sexes, who have never done any thing amiss in all their well-regulated lives—one would prefer a hand-to-hand fight with the devil on his own ground."

Mrs. Harding walked on for a few moments in silence, then she explained: "I am very glad Mr. Harding thinks of staying here till near Christmas; I should be sorry to leave Stasie, she has quite grown

like a sister to me."

"It will be dull here for you both."

"For me—no; less dull than London! For Stasie

---- "She stopped, for they were at the gate.

When the neat parlor-maid threw open the door of the drawing-room, it seemed to Brooke that he was

being ushered into a large company.

The day was warm, and the open window showed the pretty garden and rich autumnal tints of the trees beyond. Miss Stretton was sitting at a well-furnished tea-table, flanked by Mr. Robinson, who was evidently settled down to enjoy a refreshing cup in comfort.

In the recess of the window stood Kharapet. He had taken a glass of water from Bhoodhoo, who, in his best clothes, stood deferentially before him.

Stasie was sitting on a sofa near the window, in a wellfitting black dress, with lace collar and cuffs, her hands were clasped, resting on her knee, and her attitude graceful but pensive; a slight smile parted her lips as she listened to Mr. Pearson, who was lounging easily on the sofa beside her, and playing with a large paper fan.

When Mrs. Harding and her cavalier entered, every one rose with *empressement*, Stasie occupying herself with Mrs. Harding until Brooke had spoken to the rest. When at last he made his bow to her, she held out her hand with a soft kindly smile.

"You have come back sooner than you expected,"

she said.

"I begin to think no one expected me to return," said Brooke, laughing; "Mrs. Harding received me almost with the same words: I had better go away again!"

"Why? you don't suppose we are not glad to see you?" asked Stasie, returning to her sofa, while Brooke

coolly took Mr. Pearson's place.

"I hope so," he said, "for my first visit has been to inquire for you. Have you quite recovered your indisposition? are you your own bright self again?" looking at her earnestly as he spoke.

"Oh, quite—quite; do not talk of it any more," a little impatiently; "Bhoodhoo, get Dr. Brooke a cup

of tea."

"Thank you; I do not take any."

"You have been in Scotland?" said Mr. Pearson, drawing up a chair, and determined not to be distanced; "had you pretty good sport?"

"Very fair; the birds were rather wild, but I do not mind that—half the charm of a chase is its difficulty."

"I suppose, after the big game you have been accustomed to in India, our sport is rather slow?"

"Yes, a little tame."

"I think I should like to have a shot at a tiger, if the regiment goes to India." "Is it going to India?" said Stasie carelessly.

"I am not sure—I used to hope so," with expressive emphasis.

"Were I a man I should like to go to India," she re-

plied.

"India is a delightful place for ladies, I assure you," said Brooke, and continued to talk about tiger-shooting and boar-hunting for a few minutes; while Kharapet, who had been speaking to Mrs. Harding and Miss Stretton, left off to observe the trio. Suddenly Stasie exclaimed—

"But where is Pearl?"

Every one stopped and looked round; and Mr. Pearson, kneeling down, drew something out from under the sofa.

"The little beggar is hiding, Miss Verner," he said. The something, was a tiny pearl-gray Yorkshire terrier, with long fine hair, pathetic eyes, and a black nose. Mr. Pearson placed the little creature on Stasie's

lap.

"This is a new acquisition since you were here, Dr. Brooke. Is it not a beauty? Mr. Pearson was so kind as to give it to me; and it is such a dear little intelligent creature! He begins to know me quite well, Mr. Pearson," in confirmation of which Pearl made a nearly successful attempt to lick his mistress's nose.

"Lucky little brute!" ejaculated the young Lancer, with an admiring glance. "He is wonderfully intelligent and very good-tempered; he never bites—at least scarcely ever. There was a groom of mine he never could stand; he bit him once or twice, and, do you know, he turned out such a dishonest blackguard I was obliged to get rid of him. We always thought he tried to poison Pearl. Just before the fellow left he was very ill, the Vet. could hardly save him. He thought the dog had been dosed."

"He is a beauty, worthy of admittance to 'my lady's chamber,'" said Dr. Brooke, stroking the little creature,

who sniffed at him in a friendly manner.

"Willie is quite fond of Pearl," said Stasie to Mrs. Harding. "But Ethel is still half afraid of him—more than she is of Tilt, the big collie."

"She is a terrible little coward. I do not understand it, for she has excellent health," returned Mrs.

Harding.

"She is a dear angel!" said Kharapet in his softest tone, as he drew a chair beside Miss Stretton. "I often spoke of your fair children to my Lord Saintsbury's daughters, who were always interested, especially Lady Emily Lumley, who is a most charming young

lady."

"Ah! Mr. Kharapet," exclaimed Miss Stretton with a playful, juvenile air. "We do not want you to find charming people anywhere but at Sefton Park, humble though it be!" At which sensible speech Mr. Pearson elevated his eyebrows in a questioning, contemptuous way, and looked meaningly at Stasie. She returned his glance with an unmistakable air of mutual understanding that struck and startled Brooke, but not so much as did a glance from Kharapet, which he caught, and which showed that the Syrian perceived or imagined he was mocked. Quick as a flash of lightning an expression of deadly hatred, of fierce anger, gleamed in Kharapet's deep eyes, so baleful, so menacing, that Brooke felt he had been given a sudden revelation of the hell-fire burning below his fair soft seeming; but almost before the notion formed itself in his brain Kharapet was smooth and composed as ever.

"You are too good, too partial, dear lady," he said gently. "You move the mirth of my dear niece and her friend!" and he smiled benignly on them. Brooke was deeply impressed by this sudden powerful exertion of self-control. A distinct sense that Stasie was not safe sprang up within him, never to be quite obliterated. Stasie was equally struck by Kharapet's applying the term "my niece" to her. He had not used it since he began to show her the attentions of an

admirer. To her, his words were infinitely welcome. She took them as an assurance that he renounced all pretensions to be her lover; that he would return to the position in which he was most acceptable to her; and her heart leaped at the prospect of freedom from his persecution.

Mr. Pearson, who had quickly seen that Kharapet meant if possible to appropriate Stasie, heard this speech with no small surprise. "Is Mr. Kharapet your uncle?" he said in a loud astonished aside to

Stasie.

"Not really. He is my dear stepfather's brother, and," with a nod to Kharapet, "I am quite willing to consider him a real uncle."

The Syrian bowed with a melancholy and subdued

air.

Stasie's eyes sparkled at the happy chance thus afforded of showing her avuncular admirer that she understood and appreciated this resumption of his

original character.

Brooke listened with profound attention, not only to the spoken words, but to the vocal inflections, which were, as a running commentary, elucidating their text. He felt unusually watchful and suspicious; a curious uneasy consciousness of mischief brewing seemed to sting his perceptive faculties into supernatural acuteness, while he softly stroked the little terrier, the tiny creature sniffing and trembling as if to acknowledge and accept his attentions.

Meanwhile Miss Stretton was cross-examining Kharapet as to the routine of domestic life at Lady Kilconquhar's, and Mrs. Harding and Mr. Robinson were discussing the preliminaries of a proposed bookclub. None of them heeded the young Lancer, who, raising his eyes to Stasie with the smiling, affectionate expression they generally wore when looking at her, asked, "And when are we to begin our rides? I have made the groom use a side-saddle and tie a horse-cloth round him when exercising Cedric. He will

carry you first-rate, Miss Verner, and steady as a

rock."

"Thank you," returned Stasie, looking at him dreamily, while she twisted one of Pearl's ears. "I do not know how it is, but I seem to have lost my fancy for riding—I do not feel up to it."

"Why? how is that?" cried the young Lancer, dismayed. "It is scarcely a fortnight since you were full of it. Why, it is the very thing for you. Don't you

think so, Dr. Brooke?"

Brooke did not reply at once. He looked very earnestly into Stasie's eyes, his own darkening with an expression of anxiety, while she answered: "I really cannot tell. I tried to ride poor old Brownie—Mrs. Harding's horse—a quiet thing that is often in the cart, and though he only walked, I grew giddy and my heart beat. I felt as if I must fall off at every step he took, though Miles was leading the horse."

"If you would only try Cedric you would not fear—he goes so smooth and steadily," cried Pearson.
"Of course a brute out of a cart would be enough to dislocate you; and, I flatter myself, you would have

more confidence in me than in Miles."

"I am not so sure," said Stasie, laughing. "Miles was walking beside me and holding poor Brownie's head; you would be careering on another horse and obliged to take care of it as well as of mine."

"I think I might be able to manage so much."

"It is rather disgraceful to confess it, but just now I do not feel as if I *could* mount a horse," returned Stasie, still smiling, but with a slight trembling of the lip, which Brooke thought showed that tears were as near as laughter.

"I am quite sure all these fancies would pass away if you once found yourself mounted on a well-broken, steady horse. Don't you agree with me, Dr.

Brooke?"

"I do not," returned Brooke, who had leant back and crossed his arms on his chest, with an air of thought. "If Miss Verner persisted in following your advice against her inclination it might turn her against riding altogether. You have been here too long, Miss Verner; you should have change—sea air, seabathing would soon enable you to surmount these terrors."

He looked at her with a grave kind smile, that some-

how irritated Stasie.

"I am afraid I am growing fanciful—and—and ridiculous. If I were obliged to run about and earn my bread, I should be all right, I dare say."

"Perhaps so," said Brooke.

"I tell you what you'll do, Miss Verner," cried Pearson joyously; "come down to Southsea for a while. It is a capital place. My mother is going to take a house there next month, and she will be quite delighted to have you with her."

"Are you sure?" said Stasie frankly, and looking straight at him with great composure. "I should like

to go, if Lady Pearson would care to have me."

"Of course she would," said Pearson emphati-

cally.

"Where are you going, Stasie," asked Kharapet, who had been listening to their talk under cover of some long sentences from Miss Stretton anent "the impossibility (as you must see yourself, my dear sir) of paying all the household expenses, even our occasional little hospitalities, out of the rather restricted allowance Mr. Harding sees fit to make. Surely you have as good a right to regulate these matters as he?" etc., etc.

"Oh! I do not know that I am going any where; but Mr. Pearson says he will ask his mother to invite me to Southsea. If she is so kind, I should like to go."

"My dear Stasie," cried Miss Stretton, "you are really too much the *ingénue*. I do not know what Mr. Pearson will think of your coolly engaging him to get you an invitation from his mother."

"You know what I think," said the Lancer, in a very

low and confidential tone.

Stasie gave him a little nod as she replied, "I do not think I have said any thing wrong, auntie; Mr.

Pearson began it."

"It would do you good, dear niece, to have change of scene," said Kharapet, blandly, as he rose and approached. "If you desire it, why not take an abode? Your aunt and some of your servants might accom-

pany you."

As he spoke, Kharapet, as if to testify his complete reconciliation to his adopted niece, essayed to stroke Pearl. Not liking animals, and exceedingly distrustful, he touched the little creature with a sort of nervous hesitation which offended or annoyed the small favorite in some mysterious way, for the dog, after showing his teeth, which Brooke only noticed, suddenly turned and caught the Syrian's finger between them, and inflicted a scratch. Kharapet turned greenly white and snatched away his hand. Miss Stretton started up with a scream. Stasie slapped Pearl soundly and set him down, when he retired growling under the sofa, and, catching Kharapet's hand in both her own, began to examine it with hearty expressions of regret and sympathy. "I do not think it is much, Hormuz," she said; "and I am sure you fidgeted Pearl, touching him as you did."

"He is a venomous beast," returned Hormuz viciously, yet struggling to preserve his soft composure. "He should be put to death. It is dangerous for yourself, my dear Stasie, to have so bloodthirsty an animal constantly near you. Believe me, you had better have him destroyed."

"Excuse me, Mr. Kharapet," cried Mr. Pearson, much offended. "If Miss Verner does not care to keep the dog she had better return him to me. I don't want the little beggar put out of the way. I am fond of him myself, and would not have given him to

any one but Miss Verner."

"I do care to keep him; he is the dearest little

dog!" cried Stasie; while Miss Stretton fussed about the sufferer.

"Dear Mr. Kharapet, I am so distressed; it is quite alarming! Do come up-stairs and bathe your hand. Ring the bell, Mr. Robinson; oh! call Susan, or would you like Bhoodhoo to attend you, Mr. Kharapet?"

"I thank you," returned the Syrian gravely as he contemplated his injured hand. "It seems but a scratch, yet it is well to be prudent. I will take your advice, dear lady," and he left the room with an air of being quite at home, which completed young Pearson's

annoyance.

"I never saw a fellow in such a funk!" he exclaimed, looking after him. "Come out, you small culprit," he continued, dragging Pearl from under the sofa where he had taken refuge. "I hope you do not think yourself obliged to keep him, Miss Verner. If you are afraid of him I am quite ready to take him back. By Jove! I don't like to trust the dog with your Eastern friend. He looks quite equal to put any thing out of the way that crossed him;" and he stroked Pearl affectionately.

Miss Stretton had fortunately left the room to see that properly boiling water had been taken up to the injured man, and so was saved from hearing this blasphemy. Mr. Robinson and Mrs. Harding laughed at the young man's earnestness, and Stasie exclaimed: "But I am not afraid of him, Mr. Pearson! You shall not take him back; he is a naughty little beauty! Why did you try to bite poor Mr. Kharapet?" taking

the dog in her arms.

The little creature, whimpering, put its paws on her shoulder, as if begging pardon with a world of implor-

ing in its pathetic eyes.

"The promptings of instinct, perhaps, as in the case of the groom," said Brooke gently, with a smile, as he watched the effect of his words on Stasie.

She flushed up. "You are both of you very rude, and not at all witty! Do you forget that Hormuz,

after Aunt Clem, is in a sense my next of kin? He is not 'rough and tough' like Joe Bagstock and the typical Englishman; but though he is gentle and considerate, he may be just as brave and true as the best

of you!"
"One for his Nob!" exclaimed Mr. Pearson incisively, out of his cribbage experiences. "That is a little hard on Dr. Brooke and myself, but I am sure we are both disposed to kiss the rod, and I am delighted to leave Pearl with you; only do take care of him. I shouldn't like the poor little fellow to be poisoned!"

"You are quite incorrigible!" cried Stasie.

"Come, that is really too strong," said Mr. Robinson. "Perhaps," uttered Mrs. Harding with quiet emphasis. There was a pause; Stasie looked vexed till her eyes suddenly encountered Pearson's, who was looking at her with a penitent expression, half comic, half rueful, when she burst into a natural, healthy, pleasant laugh, which seemed to restore every one to ease and good-humor. "I am afraid I cannot wait to see the result of Miss Stretton's treatment," said Mrs Harding, rising. "I have one or two letters to write before post-time, so will bid you good-by."

Brooke also rose. "I trust I shall have good accounts of the sufferer when I come again," he said, smiling, "and pray take care of the formidable animal, Miss Verner. May I venture to give him a farewell

pat?"

He stroked the little creature as he spoke, and the

dog accepted the caress with evident satisfaction.

"Ah! you are evidently the right sort, Dr. Brooke," said the young Lancer. "As Pearl approves, why, I would not mind trusting you to get change of a sovereign!"

"Will you call at the parsonage later?" asked Mr.

Robinson.

"I will," returned Brooke, as he followed Mrs. Harding out of the room.

"Well?" asked Mrs. Harding, when they had walked some little way in silence. Brooke did not hear her, he was lost in thought. Mrs. Harding glanced at him and resumed, "How do you think Stasie is looking?"

"I do not know," he replied abruptly, with a start.
"How?" asked Mrs. Harding, a little surprised at

the indefiniteness of his answer.

"I mean," collecting himself, "that I do not quite know what to think. She is not looking ill in one sense, but she is not well; she ought to have change of air and scene. Get her away."

## CHAPTER XXIV.

Brooke was much too practical and worldly a man to be troubled by sentimental or imaginative worries, yet he found himself haunted to an almost painful degree by a vivid recollection of Stasie Verner's face, her expression, and, above all, by the brilliant yet

strained look in her eyes.

She was somewhat changed too in other ways-a little more guarded, a little more impatient than when he first met her—less of a schoolgirl—less lighthearted. This was but natural. Four or five months at her age are equivalent to years later on; still he could not resist the impression that she was neither so happy nor so much at ease as formerly. That the greatest change of all was towards himself he felt rather than acknowledged. She was frank and friendly, and quite glad to see him, but all the old eagerness to talk to him, to hang on his words, to bring every doubt, every aspiration to him for solution or direction, all this ardent seeking of his guidance, which had half flattered, half amused him, had entirely disappeared. She neither sought nor avoided him. She liked to talk with him as she would to any pleasant acquaintance, but she had

closed like a mimosa, retired into some citadel, the existence of which he had not suspected, where she defied intrusion or inspection. It was strange the effect produced by this dropping of a semi-transparent veil before the visible evolution of a pure strong heart or mind—or both in one—from formless childhood into ripening womanliness; the sense of amusement vanished, and in its place came an eager longing for the unhesitating confidence once so freely given, an ardent, almost passionate desire, to be welcomed and sought,

as in the earlier stages of their acquaintance.

Added to this was a curious indefinable uneasiness respecting Stasie's surroundings, for which, had Brooke been a younger man, he might have laughed at himself. But he had known his inner "ego" long enough and well enough to respect its promptings, he therefore listened, in a judicial spirit, to its suggestions, that Stasie Verner was in a very defenseless position. The genteel debility of her elderly aunt offered but a poor rampart against the schemes and pretensions of the Syrian executor. Mrs. Harding was kind, faithful, clever, but too enslaved to be of much use. Mr. Harding was blind, and deaf, and dumb, and brutish from excess of animal selfishness. Stasie's only other friends, Mrs. Mathews and her daughter, were powerless; and here among these contending currents of low motive, selfish passion, avarice, and greed, the nobly-planned, graceful, girlish nature, so richly freighted, so sweet, so fair, must drift without watch or pilot. What would become of her?

And Kharapet! He was inclined to mock himself for the intense dislike and fear which had sprung up within him towards the gentle Eastern. He must have been rejected, or whence had the feelings arisen which betrayed themselves in the glance of deadly hatred

which Brooke had noticed.

The only pleasant item in Stasie's environment was the gay, boyish, young soldier, and Robinson, though he did not count for much. Pearson was bright and attractive, and Stasie evidently liked him. Yet Brooke could not divest himself of a fear that by fair means or foul Kharapet would possess himself of the bright girl and, what he valued most, her money. "By fair means or foul"—the words kept ringing in Brooke's ears, a sort of echo

repeating and emphasizing the last.

Troubled and absorbed by these impressions, and finding no one at the deserted club, or indeed in town at that depopulated period to divert his thoughts, he soon found his way back to Sefton Park and Stasie. The little station, the road to the parsonage, had grown quite familiar. He felt a curious mixture of attraction to the place, and a wish to take Stasie out of it, away to some distant region where she would be safe from selfish schemers and unhealthy influences.

She would be a charming traveling companion, with her intelligent curiosity, her vivid sense of enjoyment; and how pleasant to the eye—but here the doctor pulled himself up. How was it that he allowed

this folly to get the better of him?

For form's sake he called on his clerical schoolmate, but of course Robinson was out; and he then, with unconsciously quickened step, proceeded to Limeville.

"Miss Stretton has gone to town, but Miss Verner is at home," said the servant who answered his ring. Brooke heard the sound of music from within, and followed the neat Mary to the drawing-room.

Stasie was sitting at the piano when he entered, and rose to meet him cordially with something of the wel-

come in her eyes he used to read there.

"I am glad you have come," she said simply. "I am all alone to-day; I feel dull and out of sorts."

"I am glad my visit is well timed," said Brooke, while he held her hand perhaps for an unnecessary second, looking down into her eyes with a smile that gave sudden tenderness to his strong face, and thinking that she had a thoughtful, even troubled, expression, different from the sunny animation he used

to admire. Her rich hair, pushed carelessly back from her brow, was rough, as though she had been lying restlessly against a pillow, and a simple morning dress, gathered into the waist with a band, showed the incomparable grace of her shoulders. A quick thrill of delight shivered through his veins as Brooke thought that for the next half hour at least he should have her all to himself.

"And it is a long time since we have had an argument, Miss Verner This is a splendid opportunity," he continued, as he drew a chair near the sofa, where she seated herself "How is it that they have left you all

alone?"

"Oh! Mrs. Harding and Aunt Clem had a quantity of shopping to do, so they went up with Hormuz Kharapet. He was down here yesterday, and staid the night because he wanted to go to the early service at Mr. Robinson's church this morning."

"Oh, indeed! And you? were you early enough

for prayers?"

"No!"—with a shake of the head. "I am so dreadfully lazy of late; that is the reason I did not go to town. I feel quite disgusted with myself sometimes, Dr. Brooke!" With gravity, "Do you think it a very bad sign not liking these perpetual services? they really bore me to death! I don't mind on Sundays, you know, and I like a good sermon, but the same thing over and over again! It is too much."

"No; I do not think you utterly lost, perhaps be-

cause I share your pernicious views."

"But there are the Misses Thompson, and Mr. Williams's nieces—they all live in the park; they never seem happy unless they are running in and out of church, or working for it, and they are so good, always going about among the poor, and so nice and gentle, while I—I never seem to like any thing that is right—yet somehow I don't feel as if I were quite wrong?"

"I am afraid you are in a very illogical state of mind," replied Brooke solemnly, while his deep-set

dark eyes glittered with a pleasant smile. "Indeed, I am afraid, in a dangerous state, for you seem disposed to think for yourself—a terrible tendency for a young lady."

"Why should it be worse for a girl than a boy?" cried Stasie aggressively. "I suppose we have some brains too? though, indeed, my thoughts are terribly

tangled. I am only sure of what I feel."

"At all events you have a fair share of brains to make the distinction. Do not fear, Miss Verner, you will think clearly enough by and by; be content for the present to enjoy your youth."

"That is to say, try and keep a baby as long as you can, which I do not wish to do! Besides, I do not

enjoy my youth."

"How so? You seem to possess every qualification

for enjoyment."

"Yes," with some hesitation; "I am rather unreasonable and ungrateful not to be more contented, when I have so much that others need; but somehow I am not! You see I lead a selfish, useless life. I get sick of the poor people; they are greedy and uninteresting. I know I should be better if I were compelled to do some work, even if I disliked it, by somebody or something that I cared to obey. Of course I like to indulge myself, and I do not think I have the spirit of a martyr; but I don't want to live altogether for self. You will think I can talk of nothing else!"

"I am interested. Tell me, what would you like to

do ?"

"For myself? I scarcely know; but I will tell you what I should like." A pause.

"Yes, tell me!" drawing a little nearer with an air

of profound attention.

"Well," resting an elbow on her knee and her chin in the hollow of her hand, "I should like to send Mr. Harding on a long, long tour to all the commercial capitals of the world, where he should make a lot of money, and not come back for six, seven, ten years, so

that dear Mrs. Harding should have a little happiness

before her youth is quite gone."

"Ah! that is a scheme I would gladly assist," cried Brooke, "with this improvement—that Harding should never come back."

His animated, trenchant tone struck Stasie, whose color rose as she looked earnestly at him. Then, averting her eyes, she said: "Yes, her life has been cruel. I do love Mrs. Harding, she is so wise and kind! How delightful to be brought up by a mother like her! How could she have married such a man?"

"Women rarely have the faintest notion what the real man is whom they marry. How can they?" said

Brooke.

"That is awful!" remarked Stasie softly, as if to herself. There was a pause. She leant back against the sofa-cushions, fitting together in her actively-working brain Miss Stretton's hints respecting Brooke's attachment to his cousin and the sudden energy of his words respecting Mr. Harding. Brooke, too, was thinking that he had perhaps spoken too freely, when a deep sigh from Stasie startled him.

She was lying back and deadly pale, her hand pressed to the left side, the fingers twitching in a

curious way.

"You are ill," cried Brooke, starting up. "Tell me, are you in pain?" She did not reply, but her strained wide-opened eyes stared at him with an expression of fear.

"Stasie!" he said, much alarmed and struck by her symptoms, but reluctant to call any aid. "Don't you

know me?"

"Yes, yes, Hormuz!" she muttered in a thick voice unlike her usual tone; "I am sorry, but it is no use. I cannot love you; don't be angry!" Then her eyes closed.

Brooke rang the bell loudly. "Have you any brandy at hand?" he asked, as the servant entered.

"I am not sure, sir; dear, dear, what's the matter, sir?"

"Miss Verner seems faint. Get the brandy, quick." The girl, looking scared, ran off, and soon returned with a bottle and wine glass. "The cellarette is locked, sir, but this is a drop cook had for flavoring."

Brooke half filled the wine glass, and with some difficulty made Stasie swallow the greater part of it. Gradually the nervous twitching of her hands ceased, her color came slowly back, and with a deep sigh she

tried to sit up.

Brooke took her hand to feel the pulse, but she snatched it back in a strange terrified way. He softly took it again. She did not resist, and her strained eyes grew smaller and less distressed. With a heavy sigh she seemed to come to herself. "Ah, how strange!" she murmured, "every thing seemed to fade away, and then to come back and close round me." She shuddered, and sighed again. "Did I faint, Mary?"

"Yes'm, worse than you did that time in your own

room!"

"Had Miss Verner an attack of this kind before?"

asked Brooke eagerly.

"Not near so bad, sir, but very like; it was only a minute or two."

"When?"

"Oh, near ten days ago, and Miss Verner would not have me, on no account, tell Miss Stretton, because she has been so worrited about taking medicine, and Mr. Kharapet was in such a taking."

"You feel better now?" asked Brooke, his eyes

fixed on her face in closest scrutiny.

"Yes, yes; nearly quite well; that dreadful giddiness and beating of the heart is gone; it was frightful!"

"Would you like to go and lie down?"

"No, thank you, I am all right now. I will go out presently and see Mademoiselle and the children,"

"It will do you good, but wait a few minutes."

Mary retired with the bottle. "May I stay and walk with you?"

"Oh yes, if you like." A pause. "I do not care to be alone. I am so glad I am going to Lady Pearson's next week. I shall enjoy the sea. I have not seen it for so long."

"Yes, a change to the sea-side will make you quite

well."

"Do-you really think so? How delightful! for, do you know, I am tired feeling odd and unwell. I cannot describe how, and poor Dr. Hunter's medicine does not do me one bit of good."

"How do you feel, Miss Verner?"

"Oh! dizzy, and faint sometimes, and so restless at night, and then I have odd fancies. I know they are unreal, and I will *not* yield to them, but it is hard to resist;" then with a change of tone, "perhaps it is only indigestion?"

"Only indigestion," echoed Brooke. "You don't know what a fiend indigestion is! What have you

eaten to-day?"

"I had a chop for my luncheon; but I could not eat it, and I had a pear, and some little bits of helwa."

"Helwa! that is an Eastern sweet?"

"Yes! it is delicious. Bhoodhoo makes it for me, and another kind—with flour and honey—something

like rahat lakoum, but not quite the same."

"Bhoodhoo makes them!" repeated Brooke as if lost in thought: then, rousing himself, said pleasantly, "Do you never share these goodies? I am rather fond of such things."

"Oh yes, you shall have as much as you like; bring

me that bonbonnière that is on the piano."

Brooke obeyed, and Stasie opened and presented it to him. "They are differently flavored, some with fleur d'orange and some with cocoa-nut. No one likes cocoa-nut but me. It is one of the few things I remember at Mardin. Do you like it?"

"Not much. However, I will try some of both, if you will allow me," helping himself, but not eating either.

"I will give you a piece of paper to wrap them in, they are sticky." She rose from her seat, and made a step forward, then, stopping short put her hand to her head. "I am still giddy," she said. "I never was so bad as this before," sitting down again.

"Have you often been similarly affected?" asked

Brooke, with deep though disguised anxiety.

"No! only once or twice, but very slightly, and I got quite right in a few minutes to day. Oh! I must not fancy myself worse than I am. I will go and put on my hat. I quite long for some fresh air. Do you think you gave me too much brandy?"

"I do not think so; let me prescribe."

"Oh no!" she cried, her usual animation returning, and a quick faint blush rising on her cheek. "Oh no, I want you for a pleasant friend—not a doctor, who would make me take things and do things I don't like."

"Might I not be friend and physician too?" asked Brooke, struck by her evident shrinking from him in

his professional character.

"No, no!" reiterated Stasie; "you cannot be both. I do not like doctors—I mean," coloring at her own thoughtless speech, "I do not like them as doctors."

"I should be very vexed if I thought you disliked

me," said Brooke earnestly.

"But I do not," said Stasie frankly. "I was vexed with you once——" she paused and raised her eyes with a sweet arch look to his—" because you thought I had such bad taste as to engage myself to poor Bob Mathews! You know you did; and you showed pretty plainly what you thought of me."

"I was a dense idiot to misunderstand you," cried Brooke warmly. "Will you allow me humbly to beg your pardon, and more, grant it?" He held out his hand; Stasie hesitated half an instant and then gave

him hers. Brooke held it, gently but closely, looking at her with deepest attention. "You are feeling more yourself, I see."

"Ah!" cried Stasie, struck by the grave tenderness of his manner, "you are anxious about me, Dr. Brooke: you think me very ill. Believe me, it will not signify much. I have always been so well, it seems impossible that I should be really ill. I shall get quite strong, quite myself, when I go to Lady Pearson's."

"I believe so too," returned Brooke, greatly touched by this struggle of a strong generous vitality against the evident indisposition that oppressed her. "Stay

as long as you can. When do you go?"

"Next Thursday."

"That is nearly a week off. I shall come down and see you again before you go, if you will allow me? And, Miss Verner, pray confide in Mrs. Harding; she is truly attached to you, and I need not tell you how kind, how considerate—in short, I know few like her."

"Nor I," returned Stasie, thoughtfully. "Now I will put on my things, and you will kindly walk with me to Sefton House. I will stay with Mademoiselle Aubert and the children till Mrs. Harding and Aunt

Clem come back. I don't want to be alone."

"You are right, Miss Verner. You suggested indigestion as a possible cause of your illness. Suppose you avoid these Eastern sweets for a few days?"

"Very well, I will let you prescribe so much," said

Stasie, as she left the room.

She was soon equipped.

"It is dark and threatening," said Brooke, looking through the window; "still I think the air will do you good.

"I am sure of that. I do not mind a wetting in

the least."

As they passed through the hall, Bhoodhoo was there removing the dead leaves and twigs from some plants which decorated it. He paused, and, turning, saluted Stasie with dignified deference.

"Missee not well? Missee better now? Me make nice dish for missee's supper; the house all sick when missee Sahib sick," he said, raising his hand to his head.

"Oh, I am quite well again, Bhoodhoo," returned

Stasie, smiling kindly on him.

The man bowed, and, raising his eyes, they met those of Brooke. He stood gazing as if fascinated, until Brooke followed Stasie through the door out of

sight.

"Really," she said, as they walked leisurely towards Sefton House, "I feel quite regal with so devoted a 'personal attendant' as Bhoodhoo. The poor fellow has quite attached himself to me. You know he used to be at Mardīn, and knew me as a little child."

"Indeed! but he has the look of one of those non-

descript Bombay fellows that will do any work."

"Yes, he came from Bombay, I believe, to my step-

father at Mardin, so Hormuz says."

Brooke made no reply, and they said little more till they reached Mr. Harding's house. Here Brooke made his adieux somewhat lingeringly, though he refused to come in and see Willie and Ethel.

"On Saturday or Sunday I will run down to see Mrs. Harding," said Brooke, careful not to alarm Stasie by any exhibition of anxiety, "and I shall, I hope,

find you all right and blooming."

"Thank you," she returned, while she thought, "Had Mrs. Harding been at home he would have found time to come in. Poor Mrs. Harding, what a

pity they were parted!"

Having watched his companion enter the porch, Brooke turned away and walked a few paces slowly, as if in deep thought, towards the railway station; then he stopped, drew a time-table from his breast-pocket, and studied it for a minute or two; next he looked at his watch, then struck away down the embowered avenue at a steady pace, as if he had to do a certain distance within a given time. At the foot of

the hill in which the avenue ended he encountered

Mr. Robinson, who greeted him cordially:

"So sorry to have missed you, Brooke. I suppose you have been at the parsonage. Where are you going? you are turning your back on the station."

"I am going to take the train at Welwood. There is no one at Sefton Park to-day except Miss Verner, and I have talked to her till she is tired, and has taken refuge with the French governess and the children, so I thought a quick walk would do me good."

"I dare say it will. It is over three miles to the Welwood railway station. I wish I could come with you, but I have to meet the architect and Mr. Williams at four-thirty. They are going to make a push at last about a permanent church."

"I will not keep you then: see you soon again;" and Brooke strode on with a far-off look in his eyes,

and his brows knit in deepest thought.

The road led through an undulating country richly wooded, studded with charming villas in the highest condition of care and cultivation, and interspersed with breezy commons.

Brooke scarce noticed these pleasant features. He walked like a man occupied by a set purpose; but though his pace was good-three miles an hour-the shades of a dull evening were closing round him before he reached the village of Welwood, and a slow drizzle, more mist than rain, began to fall.

He did not go direct to the railway station, however, though in time to catch the four forty-five up train, but, turning into the post-office, which was also a general shop, he asked his way to Dr. Hunter's resi-

dence.

Of course on reaching it the owner was out, but an elderly servant said her master would soon be in, and begged the visitor to sit down and wait his return.

Brooke accepted the invitation; he was shown into a somewhat dingy back-parlor, and supplied with a local paper. Time seemed to go very slowly for the next twenty minutes. Brooke was unusually restless; he rose and walked to and fro, he returned to his chair, he took up the newspaper and threw it down again; at last sounds of a door opening, of heavy footsteps approaching, told him his mauvais quart d'heure was over; next a stout elderly man, exceedingly neat in attire, rosy of face, with a fringe of nice white hair round a bald space on the top of his head entered and saluted him with old-fashioned politeness.

Brooke introduced himself as a relative of Mrs. Harding. Dr. Hunter bowed, and Brooke continued: "I have ventured to trespass on your time in order to tell you of a sudden attack of faintness from which Miss Verner suffered this afternoon, for two reasons—first, because I am, both on Mrs. Harding's account and for other reasons, interested in the young lady; secondly, because I thought you might like a profes-

sional account of the seizure.'

"Certainly, certainly. I am much obliged to you."
Brooke accordingly proceeded to give an accurate account of the symptoms he had noticed in Stasie, and succeeded in drawing Dr. Hunter into a dissertation on "the case."

Of course the conversation bristled with technicalities; but the elder physician was little disturbed by the younger medico's report. "An ordinary case, my dear sir; quite an ordinary case. The young lady is low. She has scarce come to her full strength, she is consequently slightly feverish, perhaps a little hysterical, and inclined to yield to any tendency to coma; nothing more common with young ladies. I see," glancing at Brooke's card, "that you are a military surgeon, you have therefore not much experience in this class of disorder. But I assure you, I have not seen the smallest cause for uneasiness to Miss Verner's friends. It must be six weeks since I was first called

in, and she is decidedly better. There may be a little weakness about the heart. Mr. Kharapet, that Eastern gentleman who is frequently at Sefton Park, tells me the young lady's mother died of heart disease. But really there is not much the matter with her."

"Then you feel quite sure there are no exceptional

symptoms?"

"Perfectly certain, my dear sir; and you may tell Mrs. Harding so. It is one of those cases where medicine is of little avail. Time and, above all, change of scene, are the best remedies. I meet such

instances every day, sir, every day."

"Then I will detain you no longer," said Brooke, rising, "and can only reiterate my excuses for occupying your valuable time. One word more, may I depend on your silence respecting this visit? I do not care to appear in the eyes of Mrs. Harding and her friend as a stupid alarmist; moreover, my visit might make Miss Verner uneasy if it came to her ears."

"Trust me, trust me," replied Dr. Hunter, cordially. "We doctors can keep secrets; but you may make your mind easy, it is a common case, quite a common case." With much courtesy he escorted Brooke to the door, and watched him go away into the damp darkness with a heart as gloomy as the weather.

## CHAPTER XXV.

WHEN Brooke reached Waterloo Station, he made a hasty dinner in the refreshment-room, and then drove

straight to his lodgings.

It was a dark, damp night. He was glad to draw up an easy chair and to stir the fire into a blaze. After pondering for some time with painful intensity on the symptoms he had noticed in Miss Verner, on the evident indications that her health had been deteriorating since she had gone to reside at Sefton Park, he started to his feet and went to the sideboard, on which stood a large tin dispatch-box. Unlocking this, he took out a thick manuscript-book, his journal, and re-established himself before the fire. Opening the volume, he sought through its pages till he found certain entries, and read as follows:—

"March 26, 18—.—A messenger came into cantonments this morn ng from the Nawaub Assamodoolah, a Talookdar of Oudh, living some koss away from Lucknow, requesting medical aid for his son, who was seriously ill.

"Dr. C. begged me to accompany him, as he did not care to

go alone. The old man begins to doubt his own nerve.

"A long tiresome ride brought us to the Nawaub's abode, where, after some delay, we were admitted into his presence. He received us graciously, but under his oriental calm and dignity of manner I could see that he was oppressed by deep anxiety.

"He explained at some length the illness of his son—his restlessness, his sleepless nights, his constant nausea, and frequent palpitations; while the last symptoms, cold sweats and slight convulsions, had frightened the father into seeking help from the English doctor.

"Dr. C., after putting some questions respecting the earlier

stages of the malady, proposed to see the sufferer."

A short description of the apartment adjoining the zenana where the boy lay, followed, and then the entry continued:

"Doctor C. requested me to examine the boy, a handsome little fellow of eight or nine years old. I found him very weak, skin hot and burning, very irregular action of the heart, respiration markedly hurried and laboring, while the dilated pupil of the eye and glassy look struck me as peculiar, as were also slight convulsive movements of the limbs, occurring at intervals.

"I could find no apparent cause for the symptoms. We inquired into the patient's previous condition, his diet, etc., from the women around the charpoy, as the boy seemed dull and averse to speak. I felt fairly puzzled. Dr. C., I could see, was also in the dark. After a short consultation we agreed that a sedative draught to allay the general irritability was all that could be done. This we compounded on the spot, having brought medicines with us, and left directions for its use.

"On returning to the apartment where the Nawaub had received us, Dr. C. asked who attended to the sick boy? A simple question, which the father answered with some elaboration. The boy's mother, his nurse, a bearer devoted to his service, cared, cooked for, and watched over him.

"After the usual offering of scents and sweetmeats, not omitting

sundry gold mohurs, we rode away.

"Talking over the peculiar features of the case and the difficulty of accounting for them, Dr. C. surprised me by exclaiming, 'But there, it is no use conjecturing—the boy is being poisoned. He is the Nawaub's favorite son, and his mother's enemies or his own are doing away with him. Nor is there any use in making a disturbance, for we could never prove any thing.' Whereupon he proceeded to describe an alkaloid poison much used by Thugs, which is so quickly absorbed, so rapidly evaporated, that it does not leave a trace after an hour or two. This he felt sure had been administered."

Brooke turned a page, and read under date of March 28th:

"News reached us this afternoon that the Nawaub's son died in convulsions about dawn, and my syce, who had accompanied me on our expedition, speaking of the event, observed: 'It would have taken many doctor Sahibs to have cured the *chokra* when he stood in the way of his elder bro'her.'"

Brooke laid down his journal, and, leaning back, recalled to his mind all he had noticed in Stasie that day. The strained, dilated eyes, the faint but perceptible quiver of the under lid; the faintness, the wandering words that betrayed Kharapet's avowal to her, and served as a commentary on his look of hatred which had impressed itself upon Brooke's memory; the twitching hands, the palpitating heart, the relief from alcohol.

These were startling coincidences.

Still, with all the belief in an Eastern's capability for crime, natural to an Englishman who had had rare opportunities for seeing below the surface, Brooke hesitated to believe that Kharapet would dare the tremendous risk of attempting to poison Stasie Verner, surrounded as she was by all the security of a family, English servants, the safe routine of a well-ordered house.

True, the introduction of a Bombay servant was suspicious; but, even with his aid, how difficult to administer any poison that should affect only one out of a household that partook of the same food, the same drink.

At this point, Brooke bethought him of the morsels of helwa he had carried away. Stasie said that no one liked the flavor of cocoa-nut save herself. It was now more than an hour since he had eaten; he would experiment on himself. A dose that could affect a slight girl, scarce yet come to her full strength, would be a mere indication for him, but with his experience a mere indication would suffice. He took the paper from his pocket and unfolded it. As he did so, the remembrance of Stasie's slender white hands, still trembling as she wrapped it up, came back to him vividly, thrilling his heart with a sweet passionate yearning. The thought that a creature so fair, so young, so generous and defenseless, should be the victim of a foul attempt, sent icy darts shivering through his veins from head to heel. Whatever of doubt or hesitation had hitherto staid him vanished before the rising glow of love and tenderness. He loved Stasie-loved her truly, purely—and, whether from schemes against her life or her happiness, he would save her at any risk to himself. Having eaten two of the largest fragments of the helwa, he again took up his journal, turning over many leaves hastily, till he found another entry on the topic then occupying his mind. The colonel's favorite syce had been taken violently ill, with symptoms strongly resembling delirium tremens, which in a wine-abjuring native were extraordinary. A curious combination of circumstances led to strong suspicion that poison had been administered to him by a man of lower caste, also in the employment of the colonel, with whom he had had a quarrel. The syce died, but no trace of poison could on examination be found. Further on, Brooke found notes of undoubted cases of poison by Datura Stramonium in the Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy Hospital in Bombay. He studied all the details with intense painful reflection, and recalled other and slighter particulars imprinted on his memory, the conviction growing on him that the subtle poison he feared, would produce in small doses exactly the same effects as he had remarked that day in Stasie Verner. He closed his book and set himself to review the

position.

He had long ago seen that Kharapet was in love, in his crawling slimy fashion, with Stasie; and seen too that for a while she was unconscious or careless of the effect she had produced, while her frank friendliness was quite misunderstood by the Syrian, whose two strongest passions were centered in her-greed for money and greed for herself. That she had rejected him, probably more than once, Brooke gathered from Stasie's wandering words when half unconscious. He felt inclined to think she was now the object of one of those deadly murderous passions which more than any thing else is suggestive of hell and the devil! Then, if Stasie died unmarried and under age, her fortune would be Kharapet's. Here was a tremendous temptation to use the power of silently, safely inflicting death; nor did Brooke doubt that, with his experience of Indian life, Kharapet possessed this power. It was remarkable too that he had told Dr. Hunter Stasie's mother died of heart disease; Brooke determined to try to ascertain if this was true. But, above all, the most suspicious circumstance was the introduction of the man Bhoodhoo. Without some such tool Kharapet could not, unless at a great risk, attempt to tamper with Miss Verner's life. All the circumstances seemed to fit into the diabolical design Brooke suspected. And, if he were right, what could he do to counteract it?

He rose and paced the room, striving to see another side to the picture that his imagination presented in such strong colors.

Kharapet was a successful man. He had made a

hit in London society of a very good class. He seemed in no want of funds; but this point was extremely uncertain; he might even aspire to a wealthy wife other than Stasie Verner. Brooke knew the somewhat exaggerated value placed by Europeanized Orientals on social success in England. Could Kharapet be so short-sighted as to risk the loss of all this, the chance of a painful and ignominious exit from this mortal life, by committing a hideous crime. Surely calculation, self-interest, would keep him back.

Like most men who have been much in the East, Brooke had a very low estimate of Oriental morality, and was disposed to credit Kharapet with capability for base and cruel crime; but he also counted more certainly on the deterrent power of his cowardice. No; it was impossible he could entertain so danger-

ous, so difficult a design.

"I am hipped and out of sorts myself," thought Brooke, "or I should not be so ready to accept these horrible fancies for possibilities. I must persuade Mrs. Harding to take Stasie to Filmer. That Welwood doctor is an old woman. Now I can venture to speak to Filmer. But suppose this nightmare-idea of mine were right, what could I do for Miss Verner? I see nothing for it but to marry her! Ay; but for that two consents are necessary! and time—time is all important."

Again he lost himself in uneasy, indistinct thought, not without gleams of delicious hope. At length, rousing up, he looked at his watch. "It is more than two hours since I swallowed that stuff, and I do not feel the slightest discomfort, the slightest sensation that I could construe into a symptom. I may be wrong, quite wrong. I trust in God I am. If I do injustice to that sneaking Syrian, I beg his pardon. At the same time I wish he might never offend my sense of the fitness of things by entering the same room with Stasie Verner."

Though a man of strong common sense and considerable self-control, Brooke found himself unable to regain his usual tranquil, equable condition of mind. The struggle went on perpetually in his brain between the memory of Stasie's attack and its possible cause, and his more every-day view that such a solution was in the highest degree improbable. The third day he could stand it no longer, and made his way at an earlier hour than usual, to Mrs. Harding first.

He found her prepared to start for London, in order to meet Johnnie and escort him home for a couple of days' holiday. She was looking bright, or at least less depressed than formerly.

"I am sorry to leave you, Jim, but I am afraid of losing the train, and Johnnie will be looking out for me. I am in hopes he is greatly improved, he writes

such nice letters."

"I am glad to hear it! Boys are queer, unaccountable creatures; one can never calculate how they will

turn out. I suppose Harding is in town?"

"Yes. He is rather busy just now. Some Bombay friends of Mr. Kharapet's are in London, and occupy him a good deal."

"And how is Miss Verner? She seemed very un-

well when I was down here last."

"So she told me, and I felt quite uneasy about her; but she is certainly better, and in high spirits at the idea of going to stay with Lady Pearson. She goes to Southsea the day after to-morrow."

"I am delighted to hear it; nothing will do her so much good as change of air. When she returns, Livy, if you are still anxious, you must take her to Filmer—

Sir Harcourt Filmer."

"Then you think she is really unwell?" asked Mrs. Harding anxiously. This conversation took place as they walked down the road to the station, whence Brooke had just come.

"I think prevention better than cure," said Brooke;

"and I believe Filmer quite the best man she could go to."

"Are you going to call at Limeville, Jim?"

"Yes, of course. Shall I find Kharapet there?"

"No; he has not been down here for several days. Do you know, I think he has given up Stasie as hopeless. There has been an indefinable change in his manner of late, for the better."

"I am glad of it," returned Brooke dryly. "How does he like such a dangerous rival as young Pear-

son?"

"I do not know; but do you really think him dan-

gerous?"

"How can a man judge of another man's attractions?" said Brooke, laughing. "I can only say, I feel greatly disposed to enter myself for the stakes against him."

"I wish you would," cried Mrs. Harding warmly.
"I have always wished you and Stasie would take a

fancy to each other."

"At present I do not see the faintest chance for me," said Brooke.

"How do you know till you have tried to win her?" said Mrs. Harding eagerly. "Try, you have my best

wishes, and rely on my keeping your council."

"That is all-important," said Brooke, smiling to think how soon his new-formed wishes had forced themselves to his lips. "There—there is the bell; your train is in sight!"

"I declare!" exclaimed Miss Stretton, as she saw Mrs. Harding and Dr. Brooke pass, from the window of a small front room which she called the "study," where she generally wrote her letters and made up her rather confused accounts, and where at that moment she and Stasie were inspecting a new dress-basket just arrived, for the better conveyance of the latter's finery to Southsea. "There is Dr. Brooke with Mrs. Hard-

ing. Why, it is barely ten minutes since he went up the road. I suppose he is going back with her to town."

"Very likely," replied Stasie, busying herself with the buckles of the basket. "It will be pleasanter for

her than going alone."

"Perhaps so; a good deal pleasanter, I dare say!" said Miss Stretton, not without significance. "Well, Mr. Harding may have his peculiarities and faults, and I know he is not a favorite of yours, Stasie; but I must say he seems to me a most affectionate father, and very fond of his home. I am sure Mrs. Harding has every comfort, and—"

"Man does not live by bread alone, nor woman either," remarked Stasie in a low tone, while Miss

Stretton went on without heeding.

"And I do not see the hardship of going up to town

by one's-self to fetch one's boy from school."

"Nor I, auntie. This is a charming basket; it will take all my dresses. I hope Lady Pearson will not think I have come to make a settlement in her house when she sees such a formidable amount of luggage."

"I am sure she would be very pleased if you did," said Miss Stretton; and proceeded to deliver herself of much good advices touching the necessity of guarding against being betrayed into any entanglement with young Pearson, who was any thing but steady, and who was—Aunt Clem understood—a good deal in debt.

Stasie let her talk on uninterruptedly. She was accustomed to this strain of conversation; she had ceased to fly out at these solemn warnings, to hurl indignant and contemptuous replies against these perpetual assumptions of matrimonial designs in each and every masculine individual who approached them. Moreover, she took the opportunity of turning over in her mind the probable truth of her aunt's suspicions anent the Platonic friendship which undoubtedly existed between the doctor and Mrs. Harding, not that

Stasie was disposed to think evil, but she knew what a cruel suppressed life Mrs. Harding's was. She saw what an interesting woman her friend must be, especially to a man who had once felt more than cousinly regard for her. She remembered the emphatic wish uttered by Brooke only three days before, that Mr. Harding might never return, and the tender regard for the trust he expressed for his cousin.

It was his sympathy for his early friend that drew him so often first to York Gate and now to Sefton Park, and she, Stasie, must rule her own heart carefully to resist the strange influence—the almost irresistible attraction which the undemonstrative doctor

possessed for her-above all, to hide it.

"I know he is good, and clever, and nice," she thought in the depths of her honest heart, "but if he be not nice for me, I must not care how nice he be. I fancy I let him see too much once, but I did not know what I felt then. Oh! how glad I am to go to Southsea! I shall see all sorts of nice people there, and in a multitude of fancies as well as counsellors there will be safety."

Miss Stretton had wound up her exordium by a weighty sentence. "Believe me, Stasie, dear, it is not the brilliant butterfly of fashion, the reckless man of fascinating exterior, who can make a woman happy, but rather the man of more unpretending style but of gentle nature, deep feeling, high religious principle,

like---"

"Dr. Brooke is in the drawing room, ma'am," said the parlor-maid, opening the door.

Stasie laughed gayly. "That was not the name you

were going to finish with, auntie?" she said.

"Certainly not," returned Miss Stretton sharply. "I dare say Dr. Brooke has his principles, but I am sure they are not religious ones. I suppose we must ask him to luncheon."

"Oh, of course; and ask Bhoodhoo to make something nice. He could, I believe, out of an old bagpipe, like the man in the story Mr. Robinson told us.

"You had better go to the drawing-room, Stasie. I

must really change my cap."

Brooke was playing with Stasie's dog when she went into the room, and he still held the little animal under one arm as he advanced to meet her, looking eagerly into her face as he said:

"Well, Miss Verner, I see you are better. I trust you have had no return of the faintness that frightened

me the other day?"

"Oh, no! not in the least. I feel better than I have done for some time. What friends Pearl seems to make with you?"

"Yes; he is a nice intelligent little fellow. Has your friend Mr. Kharapet got more reconciled to the

formidable animal?"

"I am not quite sure," said Stasie, smiling. "I do not think he is quite comfortable when Pearl is in the room, and Pearl knows it quite well, and is ready to bark and snap and growl in the most absurd way, as if he gloried in frightening Mr. Kharapet. I am afraid Mr. Pearson puts Pearl up to these tricks."

Brooke laughed, put down Pearl, and placed a chair for Stasie where the light would fall on her

face.

"No, I will not sit there," she cried. "You want

to examine me, and I will not have it!"

"Why?" said Brooke gently. "Are you cross because I am truly anxious to see you once more enjoying the glorious health you seemed to have when first I

had the pleasure of meeting you?"

"Yes, it was a cross speech and unreasonable," said Stasie, suddenly conscious of her perversity. "But I have been so badgered about my health, and I am cross and irritable. I do not understand myself. Ah! by the way, have you told Mrs. Harding about my-fainting?"
"No. I did not know your wishes on—"

"Oh! thank you," interrupted Stasie. "I forbade Mary to say a word, so now it is all right." There was a pause. Brooke's mind was full of the fair girl who sat opposite to him stroking Pearl in an absent way,

and vet no words came to him.

"I am going to Lady Pearson's the day after tomorrow," said Stasie abruptly; "and I feel so delighted; I fancy somehow I shall be quite well there. I like the sea, and I shall hear music—military music—and I don't know how it is, but I feel as if I wanted to escape from this place, though I was quite pleased to come here. I dare say all this seems silly enough to you."

"By no means. The place does not agree with you. I am very glad you are going away; you will come back quite yourself. Do you take the train here or at

Waterloo?"

Here Miss Stretton made her appearance, and soon after they went in to luncheon. Before the meal was over Mr. Pearson was announced.

That gentleman entered in some excitement.

"How do you do, Miss Stretton? good-morning, Miss Verner! Ah! Dr. Brooke, how are you? I have a letter for you, Miss Verner, from my mother," producing it. "She is most anxious you should start to-morrow, if possible. There is to be an afternoon dance on board the "Ariadne" on Thursday. She isn't one of the big ships, so it will be a small jolly private sort of thing, and my mother thinks you would enjoy it greatly. I am going to try for twenty-four hours' leave, if possible, to run down for it."

"It would be delightful," cried Stasie. "Don't you

think we can manage it, auntie?"

But Miss Stretton, who was averse to the whole

scheme, made a contradictory indefinite reply.

"I am sure I don't know what to say, dear! Mrs. Harding is away in town, and I expect Mr. Kharapet to dinner to-morrow. Then your things are not all come home."

"Oh! you can send any thing that is not ready afterwards," put in Pearson.

"You will have plenty of dances, I dare say," con-

tinued Aunt Clem.

"Not so jolly as this one will be."

Here, somewhat to Mr. Pearson's surprise (for he had a vague incipient jealousy of him), Brooke joined in with an emphatic recommendation to Stasie—not to lose so pleasant a chance.

"What matter about going a day sooner or later?" he continued, addressing Miss Stretton, who was visibly disturbed, like a person suddenly placed in unex-

pected circumstances and at loss how to act.

"I really do not know what to say! I am sure Mr.

Kharapet will not be pleased."

"Considering how evident it is that Miss Verner needs change," said Brooke, "he ought to be very

glad that she goes away a day sooner."

"And," put in Stasie with a flash of her natural fire, "I do not care whether Mr. Kharapet likes it or not. I know you do not mind really, auntie; so, Mr. Pearson, I will write a little line to Lady Pearson, and say I will go with pleasure! It will reach her to-morrow morning, will it not?"

"That's right! I will ride through Welwood on my way back, and post it before three," cried young Pearson; "and, Miss Stretton, you'll have lots of time; there is a capital train from Waterloo to Portsmouth at four o'clock, arriving at six, or a few minutes

after; that gives you the whole morning."

"The very thing," exclaimed Brooke, as Stasie went quickly away to write her note. "And I will meet you at the station to be of any use I can. Ladies of-

ten need help at the moment of starting."

"Oh, I am an experienced traveler myself," returned Miss Stretton in a querulous tone, for she was infinitely annoyed at being thus swept along against her will, as by the force of an irresistible current. "But it is impossible I can do my duty—the duty ex-

pected of me by those who have the right to direct Stasie and her affairs when she opposes me in even the smallest matters."

"My dear Miss Stretton! why oppose her in so small a matter! Believe me, Miss Verner's friends ought to grasp eagerly at whatever offers to do her good, for her health has certainly deteriorated since she came here!"

Brooke uttered these last words with some sharpness and much decision, as he was alone with Miss Stretton, Pearson having followed Stasie to the drawing-room.

Aunt Clem looked up startled.

"Good gracious, Dr. Brooke! you don't mean to say that my dear, dear niece is dangerously ill?" the

tears stood in her eyes.

"No, by no means," returned Brooke, " but pray remember that prevention is much better than cure perhaps difficult cure."

Miss Stretton was silent and vanquished.

The next day was bright, clear, glowing, a perfect specimen of autumnal weather. Brook rejoiced in the sunshine as he walked to Waterloo Bridge to keep the tryst he had made the previous day. He was infinitely relieved; for a week or two Stasie would be safe, and he would have time to make some plan of action, to come to some decision, for, though full of grave doubts, he would not yet allow himself absolutely to believe that Kharapet could be guilty of the base crime he suspected.

Aunt Clem and Stasie did not arrive too early at the station, and Brooke was of very great assistance to them.

He was delighted to see Stasie looking radiant, in a

small black velvet Spanish hat, which suited her fair

hair and soft complexion.

"Is it not a glorious day, Dr. Brooke? I hope it will be as fine to-morrow! Do you know, I never felt so delighted about an expedition before. I have an odd sensation of escaping, I don't know what!"

"Have you?" said Brooke, looking earnestly, tenderly into her eyes. "Perhaps you are running into

danger instead of escaping."

"If so," cried Stasie with a sweet laugh and brush, "you are very ready to thrust me into it! You seem as glad to send me off as I am to go."

"I am, but I shall be still happier to see you return,

restored, as I hope you will be."

"Shall you be in London when I come back?"

"Yes, certainly," said Brooke with emphasis. "Tell me," lowering his voice and leaning against the carriage-door, for Stasie had taken her seat, and Aunt Clem had gone to buy a paper for her, "Tell me, has your heart troubled you since? have you felt faint?"

"N-no, just the least little bit, on Sunday, hardly

worth mentioning."

Brooke looked down in deep thought, then with a sudden spur from memory he exclaimed, raising his eyes, "By the way, I never thanked you for that helwa. It was very good; do you happen to have any more about you?"

"Yes, that good Bhoodhoo made some last night. I have it here," taking a packet from a little hand-

basket.

"Well, pray give it *all* to me! You are better without sweets at present." He took it from her hand before she had time to resist.

"It is really serious to be on friendly terms with a doctor," said Stasie, laughing. "Are all your profession as tyrannical as yourself?"

"Stasie, my darling child," cried Miss Stretton,

"one kiss! the train is just going."

Brooke stepped back, raising his hat. Aunt Clem

bestowed a hasty hug on her niece. The clangorous bell rang out hysterically, and with a smile and wave of the hand, Stasie vanished with the receding train; while Brooke, unseen by Miss Stretton, hid the packet of helwa in the recesses of his pocket.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

As she had told Brooke, Stasie was in the highest spirits at the prospect of her visit to Lady Pearson.

She anticipated a complete change of "scenery, decorations, and actors." This was enough to create great expectations, but beyond and above this was a sense of joyous freedom, of relief, in the certainty that for a fortnight at all events, she was safe from hearing

or seeing Kharapet.

It was ungrateful and unreasonable to feel thus, she told herself, for nothing could be more irreproachable and brotherly than the Syrian's conduct. He certainly looked ill, though he made no complaint; this was a silent protest with which she could not quarrel, but it worried and oppressed her. Now she was speeding away from vexations, with an eternity of at least fifteen days' light and liberty before her!

Beyond so large a space of time what young creature would care to look? especially one of Stasie's joyous temperament, ready as she was to believe all things,

and hope all things.

The line to Portsmouth is sufficiently pretty to interest and amuse so inexperienced a traveler. When she had exhausted Aunt Clem's newspaper she gave it to a gruff old lady opposite, who relaxed towards her, and went so far as to ask, in condemnatory tones, if she expected any one to meet her, adding that in her day (the old lady's) young women did not run about

the world alone! To which Stasie replied that the world being much better nowadays, they could do so

with impunity.

It was near sunset when they reached their journey's end, and Stasie quickly recognized Lady Pearson's dignified and portly figure, attended by a grave, severely respectable "man out of livery," as the train stopped alongside the platform. She was speedily almost, if not altogether, in her ladyship's would-be maternal arms.

"So good of you to come on such short notice, my

dear Miss Verner!"

"And still better of you to ask me," cried Stasie, accepting an offered kiss. "I was feeling that I wanted change when your invitation came, and this

is a delightful one!"

Stasie's luggage was soon disentangled, and given in charge to Lady Pearson's man. While her hostess explained that her daughter's carriage awaited them, as Sir Frederic did not think it worth while to bring their own from London. "You do not know my daughter, Mrs. Dalzell," continued Lady Pearson. "She is very bright and pleasant, rather like Van; you will be sure to like her," etc., etc. "If you are not very tired we will go round by the pier." Stasie was not tired, and much enjoyed the view as they drove round the common. The sea lay sleeping, bathed in gold by the grand blazonment of the setting sun, now low down on the horizon, beyond the richly-wooded gentle slopes of the Isle of Wight, touched with light on its western curves, shaded off into soft darkness to the east. Nearer, one of the round forts which rises from the water, was tinged with rich yellow light, in which the majestic form of a "man-of-war" at anchor showed black and solid her masts and rigging like a clear photograph against the vivid sky.

Men were playing cricket on the common—a wide stretch of green (very brown green at this season) bordered by houses of various styles and sizes at one side and the sea at the other, its shore line broken by a quaint old white fortification called the Castle. Children also disported themselves there on donkeys; gay dresses, red and blue uniforms, added color to the scene; while the shiny water was dotted with small craft, and white sails. Life—abundant joyous life—was everywhere, and Stasie felt as if a fresh stream of vitality had been suddenly poured into her own veins.

"How charming, how lovely!" she exclaimed, her

eyes sparkling.

"Yes, it is very nice," returned Lady Pearson.
"There is really nothing to speak of as regards scenery; but the sea, and the people and ships and things make up a pleasant whole. I like Southsea in the autumn—it is better still in October—when most of the London people are gone. We generally come here. My son-in-law, Colonel Dalzell, has an appointment here, and I am glad to be with my daughter."

"Yes, of course," said Stasie with a warm acquiescence. "If I had a mother I do not think I could

bear to leave her, even for a husband."

"Ah! my dear Miss Verner, that is not the usual view young ladies take of their mothers," returned Lady Pearson, smiling, "though they do not always find they change for the better."

"Well, I suppose it is because I have never known one that I have always longed so much for a

mother!"

"I am sure you would be a charming daughter to any mother," cried Lady Pearson with effusion. "But you would never want sympathizing friends under any circumstances! I am glad you like Southsea, my dear, and as we have taken our present abode for a couple of months, I hope you will prolong your visit. Your aunt cannot hope to monopolize a girl like you."

"You are very good," murmured Stasie, coloring

with pleasure, and as usual responding to the voice of the charmer. Praise was very sweet to her, not altogether from vanity, though this had its share, but because kindness, approval, love were so dear to her heart. She longed always for affection, sympathy, comprehension, and keenly felt the loneliness of her position at times. Lady Pearson was a dear delightful appreciative woman, and nothing but a growing recognition of the fitness of things kept her impulsive companion from throwing her arms round her and telling her so.

Altogether Stasie's anticipations of pleasure seemed

likely to be fulfilled.

As she was so fresh, and there was plenty of time, they took a second turn on the sea road, and watched the sun sink, leaving an exquisite flush of crimson fading into purple and saffron, and finally dying out into a warm gray as they drove slowly along. Lady Pearson returned the salutes of men in and out of uniform, and hand-kissings from ladies and children at nearly every step.

At length the horses' heads were turned towards Eastney, and stopped at one of a row of tall stone houses with large bay windows. The door stood open, giving a view of the hall beyond, and an array of hats and plaids hanging on the wall in delightful country

fashion.

"You must take us just as we are, dear," said Lady Pearson, as they ascended the steps. "This is a mere lodging-house, and we have only brought my maid and Lennard; but the people are very obliging, and do not cook badly. Lennard," to the servant, "tell the coachman to drive to the pier, and wait for the seven o'clock boat from Ryde. Mrs. Dalzell said she would return by it."

The drawing-room seemed handsome and comfortable to Stasie's partial eyes, and the view out across the Solent to the island was delightful. Then the kindly, smiling hostess inducted Stasie into her special apart-

ment, which was above the drawing-room, with the same outlook, and nearly as large. A nice writing-table and easy-chair in the window, a cheval glass, and sundry luxuries to which Stasie was not accustomed, made it seem quite grand to her. Her box was conveniently placed and freed from strap and cover, while a neat, composed young woman stood by ready to unlock and unpack it. It was all delightful, and when Lady Pearson, with many injunctions to the maid to save Miss Verner all possible trouble, when that functionary asked with bated breath for the young lady's keys, it began to dawn on Stasie's charmed senses that she was something of a personage.

"She is the very most delightful girl I ever met in my life!" said Lady Pearson to her husband, when they met in the drawing-room, before their guest descended. "Handsome, well-bred, though not conventional, and so sweet and intelligent! She would be a charming wife for any man, independent of her for-

tune."

"Hum," returned the General. "How much do they say she is worth?"

"From what I can gather, something like forty thou-

sand pounds."

"Well, take it at half what you hear-and that is

not a bad sum to start a young couple well."

"Mrs. Dalton told me, and she is sure to know. She is quite intimate with Lady Elizabeth Wyatt. That handsome Eastern who is always there, I forget his name—"

"Yes, I know, the executor," interrupted Sir Frederic. "Harding is the acting man, I think; and, if I don't wrong him, he'll make the estate pay for the

trouble it gives him."

"It would really be a mercy to marry that dear girl to some nice, good young man as soon as possible. She is terribly alone, and at the mercy of designing people."

"Eh! my Lady," exclaimed the General, laughing,

"you go ahead at a swinging pace! I suppose you

have a pattern young man in your eye?"

"I have indeed, Sir Frederic! Oh, you need not laugh; but I never saw a girl I should so like for a daughter-in-law."

"Don't be in a hurry! and be sure about the rhino."

"Sh—sh!" said Lady Pearson, whose seat commanded the door, shaking her fan at her husband, as Stasie entered, looking very fair and graceful, in a white dress with a deep red sash, and a bouquet of damask roses.

Sir Frederic met her with a pleasant mixture of fatherly kindness and chivalrous courtesy, and expressed his pleasure at receiving her at his house. Stasie was delighted with him, and showed it with a frank grace which captivated the old soldier, as they stood together in the pleasant light of a mixed wood and coal fire, chatting about their young guest's journey and the festivity of to-morrow.

"Does Lou dine with us to-night?" asked the Gen-

eral.

"No," returned his wife; "Colonel Dalzell expects some friends from town."

"Then whom are we waiting for?"

"Oh! Lord Cecil Annesley. I met him to-day. He had just come over from Brittany, and stays for the dance. You know his brother commands the *Ariadne*, so I asked him to dinner."

"All right," returned Sir Frederic, "only I wish he would come. I am very hungry, and I am sure Miss

Verner is 'famished.'"

"Lord Cecil Annesley," said a servant, throwing the door open in fulfillment of his master's wish.

"Very glad to see you!-dinner, Lennard, dinner

at once," said the General in the same breath.

"Ah! that means I am late. A thousand apologies, my dear Lady Pearson; but just as I was leaving the hotel I was stopped by Frank Guthrie. You know Guthrie, the water-color man?" etc., etc., and Lord

Cecil rushed through a fluent apology. Lady Pearson assured him he was a very little behind time, and then introduced him to Miss Verner. Stasie, who was prepared to greet him cordially, was not a little chilled by his evident forgetfulness of her.

The announcement "Dinner is on table," however, cut short her slight embarrassment. She accepted Sir Frederic's offered arm, and went down to the dining-

room.

Soup and fish had been served before Lord Cecil recognized the face and figure opposite him; then, in his surprise, he dropped his eye-glass as usual, and had a little difficulty in sticking it in its place again.

"Why, Miss Verner! Yes, of course I remember now. Had the pleasure of meeting you at Lady

Elizabeth Wyatt's last season."

"I saw you did not know me at first," said Stasie,

smiling, while a blush flitted across her cheek.

"I am infinitely flattered by your remembering me," he replied; "but the rencontre was so unexpected—I—I hope you will excuse me."

"Oh, yes, it was only natural. You see many more

people than I do."

"But not many Miss Verners," said Sir Frederic

gallantly.

"Ah! yes, to be sure. Mr. Wyatt is your guardian," remarked Lady Pearson. "Curious person Lady Elizabeth. She is always entété on some subject; this season it was the education of women in Syria—elevating their position, and all that sort of thing. She always went about with that Eastern friend of yours, Miss Verner, and quite raved of him."

"What, of Hormuz Kharapet?" cried Stasie. "Well, he is very nice and clever; quite learned, in-

deed.'

"He is in some way connected with you, is he not?" asked Lord Cecil. "Lady Elizabeth said something about it when I had the pleasure of meeting you."

"He is a sort of step-uncle, if there is such a re-

lation," said Stasie, laughing. "He is my step-father's brother."

"Hum! a connection, at any rate not within the forbidden degree," returned Lord Cecil, significantly. Stasie understood him, and the tell-tale color that came and went so readily flamed in her cheek for an instant, to Lady Pearson's alarm and disgust.

"It is amazing how women of condition can take up these fellows. I dare say Lady Elizabeth Wyatt would not let an Englishman of a corresponding grade further than her servants' hall," observed the General.

"But, Sir Frederic, Mr. Kharapet is a gentleman," exclaimed Stasie. "His brother was our consul—"

"Really, my dear," cried Lady Pearson, "you ought not to speak so thoughtlessly. You forget his connection with this dear girl. You must not mind the General, Miss Verner; these old Indians have a most unreasoning contempt for every one of a different color from themselves."

"But, do you know, Hormuz is fairer than Sir Frederic," said Stasie, gazing with simple honesty at the embrowned veteran, and quite innocent of intend-

ing to pay him back in his own coin.

The General perceived that she meant no offense, and laughed good-humoredly—"Fairly hit, Miss Verner. I must humbly beg pardon for disparaging your protege."

"Why is it that you all look down on Easterns? Mr. Kharapet is a Christian like yourself," pursued

Stasie, with some warmth.

"Like me? not a bit of it. I deny that in toto."
"Perhaps he is a better one," said Lord Cecil.

"Very possibly; but still not like me," returned Sir Frederic. "Come, Miss Verner, take a glass of wine with me in bygone fashion, as a mark of forgiveness."

"Yes, certainly; but pray say no more against Hormuz Kharapet. He has been very good to me; really more obliging about things than Mr. Harding."

"Ha! very likely. Deuced pretty little woman,

Mrs. Harding; I must confess to being deeply smitten with Mrs. Harding," said Sir Frederic.

"And she is as nice as she is pretty," cried Stasie,

"and very, very clever."

"I imagine you are one of those lucky individuals whose friends are all highly and exceptionally gifted," observed Lord Cecil, as he helped himself to olives.

"Yes; I am lucky in believing them to be so at any

rate," returned Stasie with some emphasis.

Lady Pearson laughed and nodded to her young friend, and then the conversation flowed away into other channels, till the hostess rose and led the way to the drawing-room.

"There is a beautiful moon," said Stasie, who had gone to the window to look out. "I am sure it will be

fine to-morrow."

"Alas! in this climate we cannot be sure," replied Lady Pearson, who was reading some letters which had come by the last post; "but I think the weather promises to be fine."

"I do hope it will be, Lady Pearson. I quite long

to dance again."

"I suppose you have not been to many dances, Miss Verner?"

"Pray call me 'Stasie,' Lady Pearson. I don't like

the people I care for to call me 'Miss Verner.'"

"My dear child, that is very sweet of you. I shall always call you Stasie, for I feel as if you were my daughter. You know my only girl is married and so lost to me, I may say. However, I must not complain: she is very happy."

"Yes, it seems cruel," said Stasie thoughtfully; "very cruel indeed, to lose a girl you have brought up and loved and cared for,—for eighteen or twenty

years,-just because she fancies a stranger."

"It is, no doubt," replied Lady Pearson with a sentimental air. "Yet it is what all mothers wish for, to see their children—be they sons or daughters—happily settled—a mother's love is so unselfish. By

the way, I am a rather foolish old woman about my children, and Van, your friend, is an especial pet: I must show you his last photograph." She rose and took from her work-table a morocco case, which she opened and handed to Stasie. It was a large fulllength portrait in uniform, which was very becoming to the young lancer.

"How nice, how well he looks!" cried Stasie, in genuine hearty admiration. "I have never seen him

in uniform; I am sure it suits him."

"Remarkably well," said the gratified mother, coming to sit on the sofa beside her guest, and to gaze at the picture. "He looks most distingué in uniform, and indeed, though I say it, he is a son any parents might be proud of, so kind and warm-hearted, such a favorite in his regiment—a most promising officer—a little careless about money, but years will correct that."

"Oh, yes, it is ever so much better than being stingy. It must be delightful to have such a son. And he is very pleasant with us too; we are always glad when he comes over, he is so bright and cheery," and Stasie continued to gaze with kindly admiration at the photograph. Lady Pearson's heart swelled with satisfaction; surely her maternal schemes were certain of success.

"I suppose then, Stasie," she resumed, "you have not seen much of the gay world?"

"Oh, dear no! I have been at our school dances, of course, but yours was the only real ball I was ever at."

She did not add what disappointment and mortifica-

tion it brought her.

"Was it, indeed?" said Lady Pearson, anxious to get to the bottom of her intended daughter-in-law's present position and antecedents. "You must be rather dull, my poor child!"

"No, I don't think I am," returned Stasie a little uncertainly, and then glided gradually under Lady Pearson's judicious questioning into a full and confidential account of her life past and present, until the entrance of the gentlemen changed the subject.

The rest of the evening was passed by Lady Pearson and Lord Cecil in a game of picquet, and by Stasie in listening to some tiger hunting tales of Sir Frederic's which, as they were heard for the first time really interested her, while her fingers were busy knitting a warm stocking destined for the use of Bloodhoo during the cold days of coming winter.

Lord Cecil left early, and Stasie, somewhat tired

with her journey and the excitement, went to bed.

So far everything surpassed her expectations. Lady Pearson was a dear, and as to the General, he was truly delightful. How nice, too, to see a mother so fond, and a son so deserving her fondness! How lucky she was to be noticed by such people! What a charming life they seemed to lead, so smooth, so animated! every one polite and well bred, with a pleasant word and suitable phrase ever at hand. What was it made the subtle charm of the evening?

Then, as she brushed her long fair hair, she recalled the incidents of the day. The parting from Aunt Clem (she hoped that gentle spinster was not feeling very dull and low), finally, and with a shy reluctance even in thought, she lived through the few minutes she had spent with Dr. Brooke at the railway station.

He had been so nice the last two or three times they had met, only he was absurdly anxious about her health! There was really nothing the matter with her, and she would not for worlds have Dr. Brooke prescribe for her, or feel her pulse, or look into her eyes with that searching glance of his. Heaven knows what secret weakness he might discover hidden away in the depths of her foolish heart. She wished he had left her a little bit of helwa; she had got into the habit of eating a piece while going to bed. Why were good things always bad for one! Then helwa led her thoughts to Bhoodhoo and Kharapet. It was a shame of Sir Frederic to speak so slightingly of Kharapet—

of any fellow-creature—yet she was conscious that his words did not wound her as they once would have done. She was curiously angry and disgusted with Kharapet. His avowals of love had had a strange effect; she felt as if some hot sirocco had swept away the first freshness of her youth and aged her before her time. Argue with herself as she would, repeat as she would that she was unjust, unkind, ungrateful, (especially as he seemed now anxious to conform to her wishes), she could not away with the feeling that his love degraded her in her own eyes, that his touch was contamination!

Meantime Sir Frederic Pearson in the drawing room below was enjoying the mingled comfort of a post-prandial glass of brandy and water, and a confi-

dential talk with his wife.

"Do you know," said her ladyship, sipping a little soda and sherry, "I am quite convinced that dear girl is struck with Van; a very little attention on his part will bring matters to a climax. If you had only seen the way she gazed at his photograph!"

"Pooh!" said the General. "Most girls like to

look at a good-looking young fellow!"

"Yes, but she listened with such deep interest to all

I said about him."

"Which I'll lay heavy odds was a good deal. We all know how long-winded you are when you begin talking about Van," returned the irreverent General.

"Well, my dear, have I not every right to be proud

of him?"

"Yes, yes, he is a fine fellow; but don't you make too sure of the heiress. Why, there will be dozens after her, sharp men of the world who could buy and sell our boy!"

"She has seen but little as yet, and I am sure any girl might take a fancy to Van. I rather think he is

really smitten with Stasie Verner!"

"Small blame to him! She is a fine creature, an

uncommon taking girl; if she were to accept Van I

should consider him a deuced lucky fellow."

"No doubt he would be most fortunate, so pray, my dear, be guided by me. The sooner we can make sure of her the better, both for her and ourselves, pray do not ask any of those young dandies of the Rifles, or that beauty man-what's his name-of the Marine Artillery!"

Sir Frederic laughed a loud jolly laugh.

"Why, after all, I think more of the boy than you do! I think he is a match for those men in every way."

I am sure I think so, but then there is no account-

ing for a girl's whims."

"Ah, ha! then you are *not* quite so sure of her, my lady! Quite right; never count your chickens—"
"Really, Sir Frederic," interupted his wife, "those

old sayings are very stupid!"

For once the weather was lenient to the projected dance.

Stasie woke to see a bright blaze of morning light shimmering over the sea, which laughed back again in a thousand ripples, as though life were one prolonged

morning-tide of youth and joy. \*

Stasie peeped delighted through her venetian blinds at this inspiriting outlook. She felt unusually well, with something of that delicious sense of vivid life in her heart and veins, which used to make bare existence a delight. Lately she had been a stranger to this sensation, but probably change of air and a slight degree of fatigue had insured her an unusually good night. Certainly she felt wonderfully better and brighter than she did the day before. No doubt change was what she wanted, and she would return to Sefton Park strengthened, refreshed, and quite superior to Dr. Brooke's pitying, inquiring glances.

She was completely dressed for some time before the breakfast bell rang, and busied herself writing part at least of a letter to Mrs. Harding, to be finished after her return from the dance. She had dispatched a hasty line to Aunt Clem before dinner the previous day.

Stasie was greeted with the most affectionate inquiries as to how she had slept, and whether she had been comfortable, etc., etc. She found Lady Pearson sitting behind a big tea-urn, in a becoming morning gown and lace-edged muslin cap, while the embrowned stately General looked fresh and well in a rough gray

suit, with snowy linen and a colored tie.

He was kindly and attentive to his wife as well as to his guest, giving them morsels of news from the *Times*, at which he glanced occasionally, and rising with cheerful alacrity to obey his wife's orders when she desired him to bring the preserves or to cut her some of the cold beef which was upon the sideboard. Stasie thought that if men were all like Sir Frederic, one or two would be rather an improvement to most homes, a matter she had sometimes doubted when in Mr. Harding's.

"I think you were a true prophet, my dear," said Lady Pearson, as she handed Stasie her tea. "We shall have a lovely day I hope. What time does the eight o'clock train from Waterloo reach Portsmouth,

General? Van was to try and catch it."

"It's a slow train—devilish slow parliamentary affair!—does not get in till eleven or eleven thirty, I

think."

"I hope Mr. Pearson will come," cried Stasie. "I shall be so utterly strange if he does not, and he dances so well."

"I think you may be pretty sure of him," said his mother with a pleased smile. "He certainly is a good partner."

"By George! you'll have no lack of partners, I'll

be bound," cried the gallant General.

"Still, I should like Mr. Pearson to come," added Stasie.

Lady Pearson meanwhile had opened some of her letters. "Frank says they are going to have a grand football match with the Hadleigh Club on the thirteenth; he thinks his side sure to win. I wish there was no such game; it is most dangerous and brutal," she said, looking to her husband.

"Posh! nonsense!" he returned. "It is no worse than other games. English boys do not care for play

that has not a spice of danger in it."

"Football is much worse than any thing else," persisted Lady Pearson. "Frank is our youngest boy," she explained to Stasie. "He is going to try for the Civil Service, and is now staying with some friends in Yorkshire for a little relaxation. He has been working very hard."

The General made a grimace that provoked Stasie

to laughter.

"You are too bad, Fred," cried his wife. "Well, Stasie, what should you like to do this morning? You must keep rather quiet on account of the dance. We must take good care of you, and send you back quite strong and well to your aunt."

"Oh! Lady Pearson, I don't care what we do. I should like to go out on the beach, but I shall be quite content to sit in the window with a book; this is such

a delicious, lovely place."

"If you don't want to go very early to the club, General, you might take Stasie for a stroll on the beach."

"I am quite at Miss Verner's service, if she will allow me to finish the *Times*."

"Oh, of course! I am so much obliged, Sir Fred-

eric; I am afraid it will bore you."

"What a cross-grained old hunks you must think me! I consider it an honor to be your escort. There—I don't think Van could say any thing better, eh! Miss Verner?" "No, certainly not! No one could; only please

don't call me Miss Verner."

"Come then, you will find the piano and some magazines in the drawing-room," said Lady Pearson; "and just do as you like, dear, until the General is ready. I must answer some of these letters."

But Stasie felt rather shy of playing or singing among strangers, so she took Temple Bar and sat

down in the window.

But the sunshine and movement outside were too much for the attractions of even Miss Braddon's most thrilling tales, and the distant sound of military music filled her with a vague pleasure. She sat in a kind of dream, from which she was roused by a sweet but rather high pitched voice saying—

"Miss Verner, let me introduce myself, as I cannot find my mother. Mrs. Dalzell, Miss Verner—Miss Verner, Mrs. Dalzell. Now we are *en règle*, I suppose

you know who I am?"

"Oh, yes! quite well," cried Stasie, who had started up, and shook hands with a slight elegant-looking little brunette, in a sort of yachting costume. She was a diminished, softened, beautified likeness of the General, but with a restless expression very different from his.

"So you are Miss Verner," she resumed, throwing herself into an easy-chair. "I want to look at you and consider you, for I have heard a good deal of you, and of course you are not a bit like what I expected. They said you were fair, and I cannot bear blondes; they generally want salt, but your eyes redeem you! Am I impertinent? I have the credit of it, but I am only frank. Ah! you do not like to be stared at."

"I do not think any one does," said Stasie with some spirit, "but at least I can look at you in return."

"Good!" cried the little lady, clapping her hands.

"Am I like what you expected?"

"I had no expectations," replied Stasie candidly.

Mrs. Dalzell laughed merrily. "That is flattering;

pray did Van—did my brother never mention me to you?"

"Oh, yes! but not often."

"Good-for-nothing boy! and I gave him the sweetest little dog, which I believe he passed on to you."

"Was Pearl yours? He is a dear little creature."

Having thus cleared all formalities at a bound, Mrs. Dalzell proceeded to ingratiate herself with Stasie by a series of compliments disguised as fault-finding, and finally proposed going out, pooh-poohing the projected escort of Sir Frederic.

"Papa would much rather sit indoors and read the *Times* from the births, deaths, and marriages to 'vivat regina,' and I shall amuse you much more. I want some flowers and some silks. I am a great lover of fancy-work, are you?"

"No. I rather like common useful work. I am

not clever enough to do pretty things."

"You do not give me that idea. By the way, how frightfully dull you must be at that place—what do you call it—something Park. How do you manage to live?"

"It is not so bad," replied Stasie, who was not accustomed to look on existence as a mere play-ground, and thereupon Mrs. Dalzell led her young companion into a long and full description of her home and surroundings. She manipulated her subject much more skillfully than her mother did, and drew rather different conclusions.

When Stasie and her new acquaintance returned from their ramble they found the house in some excitement. Mr. Pearson had arrived rather earlier than was expected, had breakfasted and made his toilette, and came beaming out of the dining-room to meet them. Stasie was delighted to see him. He was like an old friend in that strange place.

"Oh! I am so glad you have come," cried Stasie,

with sparkling eyes and sweetest smile, "I was afraid

something might have prevented you."

"It must have been a strong reason that would have kept me away," he returned with much significance. "And we are going to have such a jolly day! One is always on the stretch in this climate until you know what the weather is to be. Why, Miss Verner, you look pounds better already! Do you know, Lou, she is just bored to death at Sefton Park! You would commit suicide after ten days of it, and the victim is not even aware of her martyrdom."

"She is not, indeed," said Stasie, laughing, as they went up to the drawing-room, where was a lovely bouquet, fresh from Covent Garden, in its newly-opened box, an offering from the enamored Lancer to the

heiress.

She was enchanted, but not intoxicated. In the course of conversation young Pearson said, "I fell in with your friend Mr. Harding yesterday morning in the city. Wonderful thing for me to visit that moneymaking center. He is going away somewhere."

"Is he? That is quite unexpected."

"I dare say his wife will not be inconsolable, and at any rate she has that tall relative to look after her, which I have no doubt he will. Brooke can be a very pleasant fellow if he likes,"

The words seemed to lay an icy grasp on Stasie's heart for a moment; the sunshine was no longer joyous but cruelly fierce; the pleasant sound of cheerful voices was a confusing murmur; the scent of the flowers was heavy and sickening. Was it possible that others beside Aunt Clem and herself noticed Brooke's devotion to his cousin? And if there was reason for such remarks, why was she so strongly moved by them? The only sufferer from such a state of feeling would be Brooke himself; and of course she was sorry for him. He had been kind and interested in her. She would banish these uncomfortable thoughts. Why should Dr. Brooke, or the ideas he suggested, come to

tarnish the vivid brightness of her rare pleasure as he did once before? She had been silent but a moment, and what a tide of thought and conjecture had swept over her brain! As she looked up to answer some question of Lady Pearson's, she met Mrs. Dalzell's keen eyes fixed on her with startling intensity. It was unpleasant for the instant, but the impression soon passed away.

The dance was most successful. To Stasie it was a scene of enchantment, from the start in the steam-launch to the return at sundown, when the young moon began to throw a shimmer of silver over the sea.

The quarterdeck was converted into a huge tent, embanked with greenery and beautiful flowers; the band inspiriting; the boards perfection; partners flocked in files to be presented to the fair girl whose fortune suffered no diminution by report.

She gave an open preference, however, to her original cavalier, and a general conviction that Van Pearson was a "deuced lucky fellow" was adopted in both

services.

That young gentleman was not so elate as might have been expected. He had the instinct of an honest heart, and was not inordinately conceited, considering his years and profession. His mind misgave him that the liking so frankly shown was not exactly like a young girl's manifestation of love; still it was all very pleasant and encouraging.

The days that followed were diversified by visits to Cowes, to Carisbrooke, to the *Victory* (of course),

and sundry other legitimate points of attraction.

Mrs. Dalzell's untiring thirst for pleasure, her willfulness and playful tyranny over her grim looking husband, once a *beau sabreur*, amused Stasie immensely. She did not feel inclined to trust her, yet could not help liking her. "Van" got a few days' leave, and did his best to improve the shining hour, but was less

prompt in his action than his mother wished.

"Really, my dear boy, I do not know how much more encouragement you want," said Lady Pearson, as she sat in conclave with her son and daughter after luncheon one afternoon, when Stasie had been about ten days their guest. "What is the use of losing time? If Stasie Verner is unmarried, and goes out with Lady Elizabeth Wyatt next season, your chances will be considerably diminished. Why, even now that stupid Lord Cecil is not without his pretensions. You will lose her if you don't take care."

"And I can tell you, mother, I shall lose her if I am too prompt. She is not one bit in love with me! and I fancy I haven't as good a chance here, as in that infernal hole, where I am the only bit of life she

sees."

"I imagine Van is right, mother!" said Mrs. Dalzell thoughtfully. "I do not quite understand Stasie Verner. What sort of a man is this Brooke of whom I

have heard you speak?"

"A tall, grave, somber fellow, not at all handsome. Looks like a gentleman, though. I believe he did some very gallant things attending to the wounded under fire in India, but, oh! there is no danger there! He takes very little notice of Miss Verner. I see that Kharapet and Miss Stretton think he is sweet on Mrs. Harding—can't see it myself."
"Well, I have pressed Stasie to give us another

She has just gone to write to her aunt about it. You might get leave for a day or two more, and then—"

Further projects and plans were cut short by the entrance of the Pearsons' servant bearing a colored envelope on a salver. Lady Pearson opened, glanced at it, gave a slight scream, and lay back in her chair. Her son seized and read it aloud.

"Frank had a bad accident yesterday-come to him

at once."

"The football match," cried Mrs. Dalzell, turning pale.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

WHEN Brooke had seen the train disappear which carried Stasie away, as he fondly hoped, to fresh air and renewed strength, he turned to Miss Stretton, and asked if he could do any thing for her, or stay with

her till the next train to Sefton Park.

"Many thanks, my dear sir! I will not put your politeness to so severe a proof; as I am in town, I will take the opportunity to do a little shopping. I can go to Waterloo House, at least, and catch the six o'clock down train. Ah, how lost I shall feel in choosing even the most insignificant article without that dear child."

"No doubt," said Brooke sympathetically.

"So if you would be good enough to call a cab I

shall trouble you no further."

Brooke complied with her request, and then descending the steps on the arrival side of the station, walked slowly on towards Westminster.

Passing along York Road his eye was caught by some flaming placards of a sensational drama, then en-

joying the glories of a prolonged run.

The interest of the piece centered round a mysterious case of poisoning, and reminded Brooke of the intention with which he had taken Stasie's sweeties from her. He drew the neat parcel of helwa from his pocket, and, taking out a gray morsel, proceeded to eat it as he went along. The sight of that flaring poster had set him thinking deeply and uneasily. He had seen Stasie set out on her journey with a mixture of satisfaction and anxiety. That she would be clear of Sefton Park, Kharapet, and that doubtful Indian servant for a fortnight or three weeks, was an infinite relief.

It gave him breathing time; it freed him from the terrible blinding fear of what each day, each hour, might bring forth, which robbed him of his cooler judgment—of the power of weighing evidence, of coming to any thing like a clearly reasoned-out conclusion.

Now for a short time his fears were at rest. He could examine the circumstances of the case, the sources of the horrible doubt which assailed him. Even a cursory glance at the dark array of details which awaited his careful consideration, showed him the enormous difficulties with which he should have to contend should he on more mature reflection still think Stasie's life in danger. Good God! What an awful thought! and her bright face, full of anticipated pleasure, yet remembering Aunt Clem's feelings even in her own joy, rose before him. Nevertheless this same visit, from which he hoped so much might destroy all chance of his own success. No doubt Lady Pearson would throw her as much as possible with her son, and what more natural than that the debonair young soldier should be acceptable to an inexperienced girl new to the world, and ready to gild most things by the light of her own imagination; but even as the strong probability of such an ending came before him Brooke felt that his own disappointment would bring with it a degree of comfort. Young Pearson, though much below Stasie's moral and intellectual standard, was, Brooke believed, a good, honest fellow, and with him her sweet young life would be safe. How bitter a disappointment such an untying of the present hard knot would be none but himself could know. Stasie was seldom out of his thoughts, not only on account of the strange fears he entertained for her, but because of the remarkable way in which she seemed to have closed the petals of her soul against him.

During the first weeks of their acquaintance he had been half amused, half flattered by the eager pleasure with which she sought his society and conversation, although he was clear-sighted enough to perceive there was not a tinge of coquetry or ordinary love of admiration in her innocent preference. But from the hour he stupidly misunderstood her, and no doubt showed his misunderstanding, she changed to him, in a subtle, secret way that none save he himself could perceive, and from that time, too, he became aware that she was more to him than any other woman ever had been before. Now, she had indeed become "the ocean to the river of his thoughts." Was it possible that any man breathed so cruel, so vile, as to plot against the life of this fair, noble, generous-hearted creature?

"Dr. Brooke, you are in such deep thought you walk against me." Looking up with a start, Brooke found himself face to face with Kharapet at the corner of

Parliament Street.

"I beg your pardon," he exclaimed with an odd dazed feeling as if some evil omen had suddenly blighted him. "I was, as you say, lost in thought."

"It is a lovely day," said Kharapet, lingering as if he did not know exactly how to break off once he had begun to talk. "I am sure the English climate is much belied, and I am hastening to enjoy the fine evening with my friends at Sefton Park."

"You will probably meet Miss Stretton; there is no

train before six-thirty, and she returns by it."

"Returns?" echoed Kharapet, devouring his interlocutor for a moment with big hungry eyes, as if greatly surprised. "Has Miss Stretton been in town to-day?"

"She has, I have just left her. We were starting Miss Verner off for Southsea."

Kharapet had sufficient self-control to fix his eyes on the ground, yet he could not quite hide the change which passed over his face. "Stasie gone to Southsea! how—how—how is this? I was not informed— I—I——" he stopped abruptly. Brooke watched the Syrian's uneasiness and confusion, not without a degree of pleasure; he was thoroughly roused, every faculty keenly alive.

"Young Pearson came over yesterday with a note from his mother," replied Brooke carelessly. "It seems there is an afternoon dance, or a kick-up of some description, to-morrow, and Lady Pearson wished Miss Verner to assist, in the French sense. Miss Stretton hesitated, but we all backed up Miss Verner, who was of course wild to go; and she is gone."

Kharapet was silent for a few minutes, and then said with a harsh laugh, "You were certainly prompt. The one thing in English life I neither understand nor approve is your neglect of your young ladies. I had intended escorting Stasie to Southsea myself. It is not well on Miss Stretton's part to let her go alone."

A scornful reply rose to Brooke's lips, but he restrained it. It would not do to defy Kharapet in any case. If the deep dyed scoundrel Brooke suspected, he was not a power to be trifled with, and must be fought with his own weapons. If innocent, why, he was harmless, and deserved decent treatment.

"Well, you see ideas on these matters differ! You are on your way to the Hardings? Pray tell Mrs. Harding I shall not be down for two or three days."

The Syrian promised politely to deliver the message,

and they parted, going opposite ways.

"That fellow will be down on Aunt Clem," said Brooke to himself. "He is awfully cut up at Stasie's taking the law into her own hands! Is it possible that such a quiet, mild kind of a man could conspire against the life of a fellow-creature, and such a creature? but the look he gave her that day was deadly. Pooh! I must not let imagination run away with me. I'll eat every scrap of this sweet stuff before I come to any conclusion. The last certainly did me no harm, and if this too is harmless, why, that will score one to Kharapet. It must be deucedly difficult to poison one member of a family."

So musing, he proceeded to transact some business at Grindlay's, where he met an acquaintance who was

passing through town and with whom he dined at the

A few evenings after Brooke returned early to his lodgings, intending to work for an hour or two on a paper which he was preparing for a medical journal. The occupation was a relief. It drew him from the subject on which he dwelt so continuously and so painfully. He spread out his notes, which he consulted from time to time, and wrote steadily for an hour or two.

The servant of the house brought him a caraffe of cold water with a tumbler, as was her custom, before asking formally if he "wanted any thing more." On the tray was a note from Mrs. Harding asking him to perform some trifling commission, and adding, "You will be glad to hear that Stasie Verner is enjoying herself immensely, and says she feels wonderfully better—quite herself again. I fancy her fortnight will stretch into three weeks. Mr. Pearson rode over yesterday, and says she made quite a sensation at the *Ariadne* dance. He goes down again to-morrow, at which I am

not pleased. When am I to see you again?"

Brooke pulled his mustaches gravely as he perused this epistle. What a trump Livy was, and how little he had remembered her or her troubles of late! His conscience smote him. After a pause he folded up the note and applied himself to his work, but had hardly written for a quarter of an hour when he suddenly dropped his pen, and seizing the arms of his chair, sat rigid and still, while his breath came quickly. He had been struck by a sensation of increased warmth which for some minutes had been spreading over his body, and now his heart beat wildly, as if it would burst its bounds. The sideboard opposite him, the mantelpicce and its ornaments, seemed slowly turning round, and a feeling of nausea oppressed him! "I know what wine I have taken to-day," he murmured to himself, "and this cannot be intoxication." He rose to his feet, and

by a strong effort steadied himself to cross the room, and throw open the window in order to get air. Leaning out, he observed that foot-passengers and vehicles seemed to move in an odd, wavering, impossible manner. Slightly revived, he struggled to the fireplace, and looked, with a half-articulate exclamation of horror, at the reflection of his eyes in the glass, at the dilated pupils, the wild staring look. It was the same, only exaggerated, which had alarmed him in Stasie's and especially roused his suspicions.

Throwing himself into a chair, he buried his face in his hands, and remained a few minutes in deep thought. Then he again started to his feet, and, staggering to the sideboard, took out some brandy and swallowed a glass. He stood still, his hand resting on the back of a chair, until he began to feel more himself. His heart ceased to beat in heavy thumps, his vision grew clearer. At last, with a deep sigh of relief, he again approached the window, and drew a long

breath.

"I have it now," he thought. "I have at length swallowed some portion of the helwa more saturated with the poison than the rest. Yesterday I was slightly affected, so slightly that but for this experience I should not have remembered it. It cannot yet be two hours since I ate the last piece! The infernal villains! they are using some alkaloid poison. Nothing else can account for Stasie's symptoms or my own. It is a devilish plot. I know how almost impossible it is to detect. The symptoms, too, can be so easily attributed to heart disease or other natural disorders; and more, the doses may be so regulated as to cause a gradual decay of strength! how can I act, or rather counteract?"

At this point of his reflections Brooke ceased to think clearly or consecutively. A whirling cloud of terrible apprehension and of self-distrust, of painful anticipation seemed to infold his brain, and take from him the power of controlling its action.

The cold sweat stood in big beads upon his brow, and his strong frame quivered with a nameless fear.

What could be do? Gradually he recovered, and by an enormous effort of will, compelled himself to

examine the position critically and coolly.

First, he felt sure that Kharapet had determined to remove the obstacle which stood between him and fortune, the girl whose rejection had swept away the slender barrier that divides such passion as he could feel, from hatred and vengeance. For this he had introduced the Hindoo servant into Stasie's establishment, and with a view to the probable termination of his attempt, he had told Dr. Hunter that Stasie's mother had died of heart disease.

Kharapet's position gave him great advantages; he evidently had some occult influence over Mr. Harding, he was a special favorite with Mr. Wyatt, he was the deus ex machiná for good to Stasie's aunt. He was a man of irreproachable character; he stood well with irreproachable and influential people. It would be dangerous to attack him, for attack would only serve to strengthen him by its failure. What proof could Brook offer that this paragon was carrying out a diabolical plot against the life of an unoffending girl? The tendency of the British mind would be to poohpooh such dramatic transpontine villainy at once. Such goings on within the sacred circle of whited sepulchers, were incredible, impossible! Reason, common-sense, self-interest forbid them. "Is it likely a man already making his way successfully would run the awful, imminent risk of discovery, of ruin, of life, for a comparatively small stake? no game could be worth such a candle!" Brooke imagined the average Englishman saying. But if it were next to impossible that detection could overtake him, the Syrian would dare to destroy! At that time alkaloid poisons were very little known in England; moreover, Brooke reflected that much of the untamed savage still lurked under the thin lacquer of European civilization,

What was he to do? He ran over in his mind the people by whom Stasie was surrounded. The Hardings? it would be simple folly to name the subject to them. Miss Stretton? she was so bewitched by Kharapet that if she saw him administering certified poison, she would not believe it. Little Robinson might perhaps on good proof credit him with sharp practice in money matters, but nothing more. Dr. Hunter? pooh, an old woman! No; he was single-handed against desperate odds! And Stasie herself? At the thought of her his heart swelled with tenderness and compassion, with intense longing; to her of all others, he dared not breathe his terrible fears; she would laugh him to scorn; yet he must, he would save her.

Then Brooke strove to picture to himself Kharapet's probable line of action. He would not do what he had set himself to do quickly. No, the wretch had nearly three years before him, unless, indeed, Stasie married. He could weaken her, produce repeated attacks, apparently of heart disease or softening of the brain; and then whenever a necessity arose, if she were about to be married, or approaching her majority, he could kill with one dose, the traces of which would, more than probably, evaporate before an examination could be made. What a crowd of hideous images thronged

Brooke's mind as this idea presented itself.

Look at circumstances which way he would, he saw but one way of escape. Stasie must marry as soon as possible, but whom? himself? If—if only he could win her, all might go well; for danger, though round her, was not imminent. Ah! what a delicious remedy, could he but persuade her to adopt it,—if!

Four months ago, he should not have so doubted his own powers; but now, suppose she rejected him? he would lose his power to help her, or weaken it fatally. He must proceed with the utmost caution, with profoundest watchfulness. If Kharapet perceived that he sought Stasie, that he aspired to wed her, and

was likely to succeed, it might be her death warrant! and if he seemed to make love to her sub rosa, it might rouse her high spirit. Come what may, however, he would do his best to win her, and why should he not succeed? New life seemed to thrill through his veins as he contemplated this possibility; his pulses throbbed with fresh vigor. The only chance for his love, his Hebe, his beautiful Stasie, lay in their making what is called making a bolt of it! Disreputable but delicious alternative!

Now, to review the forces on his side—first his own energy and quick sight, sharpened by intense feeling; next Mrs. Harding, she would help him in all ways with Stasie, and be as useful as an ally could be, whose eyes were but half open; lastly Sir Harcourt Filmer, the leading authority on heart disorders. He was Brooke's former master and present friend, a man of great attainments, of liberal and extended views. He might be trusted and might afford valuable help, to him alone could Brooke confide his discovery, his fears.

And that cursed helwa! there was still a lot of it. He was not inclined to repeat the dose just then, but he would eat some each day, carefully noticing the effects. He was sure the poison was unequally distributed in the sweetmeat, probably by design.

Even so much determined on was a relief, though Brooke sat on and on, far into the night, reviewing his extraordinary position from every point of

view.

If—if only Filmer would take up his views, he might suggest some line of conduct more efficient than any which had yet occurred to himself.

"DEAR ROBINSON—Do you never give yourself a holiday? I have hitherto always been your guest. Can you manage to come with me up the river? We used both to pull a pretty good oar at one time. We'll

get away by train to Rickmond, have our spurt, and dine together after. I am rather out of sorts, and have prescribed for myself a course of social enjoyment, which you must help me to carry out, as I will explain. Get the curate at Welwood to take your morning prayers, and I'll put you up. I will take no excuse, though you may take your own time.—Yours always,

J. BROOKE."

This note reached the Rev. St. John Robinson the evening after Brooke had the attack above de-

scribed.

The young divine was enjoying a cup of tea after a hard day's work, for it was that on which he was in the habit of assisting his friend the curate with a distant parish, also held by the Rector of Sefton.

It was a tempting invitation.

Robinson's holidays were few and far between; and for reasons best known to himself he did not that autumn choose to take his usual three weeks' leave of absence.

Neither life nor work were exhilarating at Sefton Park. To a high-toned spiritually-minded young minister there is probably nothing more discouraging than the snug self-content of the ordinary well-to-do irreproachable citizen, whose life affords no excuse for meddling to the ardent ecclesiastic. The Rev. St. John felt that a day or two with his friend would be an immense refreshment. His old schoolboy liking for Brooke had revived and deepened; their dissimilarity of thought and opinion gave charm and variety to their talk, and after an hour or two passed with his friend, Robinson generally felt a new man.

He at once set about making the necessary arrangements, and early in the ensuing week the friends met

to carry out Brooke's programme.

The weather, however, was not propitious; it was dull and oppressive, and though unmistakably glad to see him, Brooke appeared unusually preoccupied. He looked worn too; his deep eyes had a restless expres-

sion, his thin temples seemed more craggy than usual, After a while he grew more like himself, and talked with less effort.

The rowing was something of a failure—both were out of practice, and a slow drizzle induced them to return to the hotel, where they had ordered dinner, sooner than they intended; and having reached it, the rain, which had driven them in, ceased; the low dun gray clouds, slowly parting, drifted eastward as a breeze sprang up and revealed the glories of a fine sunset.

Brooke and his friend strolled slowly to and fro the terrace before the hotel, enjoying the view, and gradually growing more and more confidential in their talk.

"You are looking rather seedy," said Brooke, as he lit a cigar and offered his case to Robinson. "Why don't you take a run over to Switzerland or Brittany? The most complete change is somewhere away on the Continent."

"I don't care to go this year," with a slight sigh; "I prefer sticking to my work—and, Brooke, you are look-

ing out of sorts yourself."

"I know I am," returned Brooke grimly. "Tell me about yourself, Robby." (This had been the Rever-

end St. John's school appellation.)

"There isn't much to tell. I am singularly well placed in some respects. The freedom, the position, an incumbency gives is, of course, a great advantage; but the income is as yet small and a little uncertain; in fact, barely enough for a bachelor."

"A bachelor, eh! Then you are thinking of becom-

ing a bachelor?"

"No, Brooke; not thinking of it. Perhaps, were I quite sure it is desirable for a priest to marry, I might wish to do so."

"Don't call yourself a priest, Robby; it is a term I am not fond of. Well, and why should it not be desirable for a clergyman to marry?"

"There is much to be said for and against," return-

ed Robinson thoughtfully. "I am by no means in favor of compulsory celibacy; but the ideal priest (you must let me use the word, it conveys to my mind a clear impression) should stand above these mere earthly ties; no human love ought to come between him and the spiritual life, of which he should be an example, and yet ——" the young man sighed.

"He would be a deuced deal better priest if he were an honest citizen, with family ties like his neigh-

bors," put in Brooke very decidedly.

"And yet a home—and there is no such thing with-out a woman to make it—must be sweet, very sweet," resumed Robinson; "and to many marriage is a safe refuge; still, the ideal man of God, strong and tender. absolved from the dominion of self-love, and caring for wandering sinners, bringing them home to their Father's fold, himself purified from earthly passion, is a glorious figure."

"Not to my mind. I prefer the full exercise of all the faculties bestowed on us. Why, you rob yourself of part of your rightful inheritance in resisting the strongest instinct of our nature; the result of such fruitless self-mastery will be 'wisdom from one en-

trance quite shut out."

"Do you not yourself willfully shut out one class of wisdom, and of a very high class, Brooke?"

"Not willfully. But come, I'll read your riddle:

you are in love, Robby."

That reverend gentleman blushed, but shook his head. "No," he said, "not in love. I think I am sufficiently lord of myself to regulate my feelings; yet were I sure, were it clear to me, that marriage would not militate against the usefulness of my office, I might—that is, I know a young lady who would make an admirable helpmeet."

"Is she at Sefton Park?" asked Brooke dryly.
"She is," returned the young incumbent, who, having broken the ice, was once more at ease.

Can it be that he has fallen in love with Stasie Verner? thought Brooke. I hope not; he might as well cry for the moon. "Do I know the lady?"

"Yes, I think you have met her; she was at the

school-feast, and is often with Mrs. Harding."

"Not Miss Verner?"

"Oh, dear, no. Miss Verner is quite absorbed by Mr. Pearson. But have you not met a slight girl with dark brown hair, and dark eyes, and a remarkably sweet smile? If you have, you could not fail to observe her."

"You are evidently far gone, Robby," said his friend with a good-natured smile. "Who is the young

lady?"

"A Miss Morison—Miss Marion Morison—they, I mean the family, live opposite me at Sefton Park."

"What? the people who flatten their noses against

the window panes to peep at you?"

"Only the younger ones! not Marion. She is quite above such things," cried Robinson, and proceeded with some eagerness to dilate on the position and prospects of his lady love, the eldest daughter of a gentle-

man who was at the head of a large business.

While he talked Brooke's thoughts flew back to the objects seldom absent from them. How curious this surface crust of ordinary every-day life, with its humble hopes and ambitions; its small loves and dislikes and efforts, lightly skinning over the hot lava of deadly hatred-cruelty, crime, which rolled its heated tide below! Could his terrible suspicions be true? At times he doubted their possibility; again he was firmly convinced of their reality; and though for a blessed week or two he was at rest (no harm could come to Stasie while under Sir Frederic Pearson's roof), but he dreaded the coming time when she would be helpless in the hands of her executioner. Dreaming over it, however, could do no good. He must plan to be near her, to carry out as quickly as possible the only way of rescue which at present suggested

itself. He must keep his head cool, his nerves steady,

or he could be of no use.

Here a waiter informed the gentlemen that their dinner was ready, and so cut short the stream of Robinson's eloquence. There is always a pleasing diversion in dinner; and with all his spiritual and lover-like aspirations the amiable incumbent felt its cheering effect.

"Take another glass of claret, Robinson," said Brooke, after the cheese had been removed. "It is better than I expected. I feel considerably the better, too, of our expedition, though it might have been more successful. London at this season is not

inspiriting."

"Why don't you go away somewhere? You can do

as you like."

"Yes, but I want to stay in London or its neighborhood. You see I have to make up my mind between this and the end of January whether I shall return to India or not, and I want to study my ground. My old friend Filmer will be in town again in about ten days or so, and I look for sound advice from him."

"Don't go back to India, Brooke. I am sure you

would do well in London."

"I don't know, but at present it is not a cheerful residence. Now you have a large house. Suppose you let me chum with you? I don't think we should bore each other?"

"Chum?" repeated Robinson with a note of inter-

rogation.

"Yes, it is our word in India for sharing house and housekeeping with another fellow. Let me come and live with you, you have plenty of room."

"I am sure I should be very glad—only, you see," growing a little red, "I have no furniture in the

rooms.

"No matter; with us the other fellow always brings his own sticks."

"If you really care to come," cried Robinson in his

natural cheery, kindly voice, "that would simplify matters, and I should be delighted. But to be perfectly candid, I am not quite sure how Mrs. Harris would take it. You see she is a most respectable person, and quite invaluable to me, as my aunt said, but a little peculiar in temper."

"So I imagine. But, Robby, we must reconcile her

to my awful presence. What's to be done?"

"I do not exactly know, but I think she rather likes you. She said one morning, as she was clearing away breakfast, that you were not the ordinary run of

whipper-snappers!"

"I am an extraordinary whipper-snapper then!" said Brooke, laughing. "Well, try and make terms with your ruler; tell her I am the most inoffensive chap breathing, easily pleased, content with a dietary of chops and rice pudding, and willing not only to brush my own boots but to give hers a polish at the same time. See if you can't manage this for me, Robby? and as soon as you can."

Robinson looked at him, a good deal puzzled by his eagerness. "I am afraid you will be bored in my quiet abode, but for me it will be uncommonly jolly to

have you---"

"Just fancy what it is to be alone in London lodgings at this season, and you will understand what a change for the better it will be to chum with you," re-

turned Brooke.

"Why, we shall be quite a cheery party at Sefton Park in a week or two," said Robinson, rubbing his hands. "The Hardings stay till near Christmas, Miss Verner will return about the 30th; Kharapet, whom I met yesterday, tells me he is coming down to stay at Limeville as soon as she is at home, so with the addition of yourself——"

"I suppose," interrupted Brooke, "that impulsive young spinster, Miss Stretton, does not think it proper to entertain so fascinating a youth as Kharapet in her

niece's absence!"

Robinson laughed. "Don't be cynical, Brooke! There cannot be a better woman than Miss Stretton; and as to Kharapet, do you know, he is really a good fellow. He takes quite an interest in my permanent church fund. He has subscribed ten pounds himself, and collected fifteen more among his friends; and let me tell you, twenty-five pounds is no contemptible sum when the subscription goes on so slowly. Ah! a real stone church would have a most beneficial effect, not only on the worshipers but on my position."

"Then I drink to its success. But I wish you had

none of that Syrian devil's money in your bag."

"Really, Brooke, you are too prejudiced. The

more I know him the more I like him."

Brooke growled something inarticulate, and then asked, "if there were any tidings of Miss Verner?"

"Yes; I heard from Mrs. Harding that she was wonderfully better, and enjoying herself immensely—dances and excursions, and all sorts of amusements. Young Pearson is always there, 'making hay while the sun shines,' I suppose."

"I suppose so," said Brooke, and straightway fell into deep thought, saying little more till they reached town, Mr. Robinson bring so deeply interested in his own hopes, fears and doubts that he scarce noticed his

companion's silence.

"Be sure you open the trenches with Mrs. Harris at once," were Brooke's last words. "I want to take up my residence with you as soon as possible."

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

"That little beggar Robinson is going it, I can tell you," said Mr. Harding to his wife, as he sipped a glass of port after dinner. "Why, there was half a ship's cargo with his name on the packages down at the station."

"Indeed! I have not seen him for a few days. I

suppose he has been extra busy?"

"I should think so! I met him going down to the station to look after his goods and chattels, and he tells me he is furnishing a bedroom for Brooke—your cousin, the doctor—who is going to put up with him for a bit."

"Is he?" said Mrs. Harding, suppressing any expression of the surprise she felt. "I wonder he cares to come to this place. It cannot be very attractive."

"Hum! that shows all you know about it," with a sneer. "There's attraction enough here, I suspect, though the doctor is a cool customer, and doesn't show his hand. I'll be curious to see Kharapet's face when he comes down and finds him settled here! Kharapet's conceit is too much for any man to stomach since he has been staying with those blank, blank psalmsinging nobs! What can you expect when a sneaking native finds himself petted up by English lords and ladies? By George! it's enough to make a dog sick. But I suspect he has met his match in our young friend — me! but she is a trump."

"There is certainly very little chance for Mr. Kharapet with Stasie," remarked Mrs. Harding, lifting her

eyes from a book she was reading.

Mr. Harding growled something inarticulate, and seemed thoughtful for a moment. "If she does not like him that's not our fault. No one can say I ever set her against him."

"It was not necessary. She is friendly enough, but

nothing more."

"Just so. And mark me," continued Mr. Harding, roughly to his wife, "I won't have you showing off airs to him. I don't want to quarrel with Kharapet. He is a devilish dangerous customer. I just want to keep quiet till Stasie is of age. It's far and away better for her not to marry till she is twenty-one, and got her affairs in her own hands. Husbands are the deuce and all to deal with. So let us go cannily to work; and

mind what I say, none of your cool stand-off airs to

Kharapet."

Mrs. Harding's delicate cheek colored faintly. She never could get quite accustomed to her husband's ruggedness; his brutality degraded her in her own eyes. In pursuance of her resolution to assert herself, she made a brave effort to reply, while her heart beat hard. "You might say so with quite as much effect, and yet less rudely," she said. "As to my manner, I am always civil, and shall be. By the by," with a change of tone, and wishing to conciliate. "I had a very nice letter from Johnnie to-day. He is greatly improved in his writing," and she took it from her pocket to give him.

"Ha!" exclaimed Mr. Harding, whose face had expressed blank surprise at her words, "That's right. It is a great advantage, a clear, legible hand. The boy will turn out well, though you think him a dunce."

"More idle than dull. I too begin to hope he will do well. I am so glad I persuaded you to let him go

to school."

"You persuaded me! Gad, that's good! Why, it

was my idea!"

Mrs. Harding wisely declined to dispute the point. She smiled pleasantly, and, "Ah! very well," glancing at her book again.

"What are you reading?" asked Mr. Harding

aggressively.

"An old quarterly Mr. Robinson lent me."

"It would better beseem you to be doing needle-work for the children or the house, trying to save my poor pocket, instead of muddling your brains with what you can't understand, d—— me if you can! Besides, a man wants some one to talk to when he comes home."

"I never neglect either house or children; but I should be more ready to talk to you if you could speak as civilly to me as you do to Stasie Verner for instance."

"To Stasie Verner! By George! I believe you are jealous!" with a coarse laugh, partly because he was

struck with his wife's words, and wished to hide the impression, partly because he had a proposition to

make of which he was a little ashamed.

Mrs. Harding made no reply beyond a slight smile, and Mr. Harding resumed: "I have asked Kharapet to dinner on Friday, and I am going to ask Warden to meet him."

"Warden?" repeated Mrs. Harding reflecting, "not

Mr. Alfred Warden of that shipowning house?"

"Yes; why not?" returned her husband, frowning

heavily.

"Because he is not fit to sit at table with respectable people. It is not a year since the papers were full of the details of his disgraceful conduct to his wife; and now he lives openly with another woman."

"Bah! You are always on the side of the wives. There is no knowing what provocation he received; and as to his dining here, it is a matter of business.

I'll stand no d—d nonsense, I say he shall."

"I cannot, of course, prevent your bringing him into the house," replied Mrs. Harding firmly; "but I will not sit at table nor will I receive him." She was a little surprised at her own courage, but the consciousness that she had a capital cause for holding her ground encouraged her.

Harding, after an astonished pause, burst out into furious language. "How dared she contradict him! She, a beggar, who had never contributed a penny to their joint expenditure! If she would not admit his friends into his house, she had better quit it. He would

be master."

"I should not mind quitting it in the least," said she coolly, "as you must very well know; but I maintain that I have a right to keep my children's home free from the presence of persons unfit to associate with them or me. Understand me distinctly, I will not meet this man; nothing short of physical force will bring me into his presence, and you will not dare to make a scene for the sake of putting yourself in the wrong."

"In the wrong! What do I care what any one thinks," roared Mr. Harding, all the more fiercely that he felt his spirit quailing before the quiet firmness of

his wife, which he so little expected.

"Yes you do care; every one cares for the opinion of those they live among. If you must entertain this repulsive man, why, ask him to meet Mr. Kharapet at some restaurant in town, though I should not have supposed any gentleman would care to have him as an acquaintance."

"That is all infernal bosh! A dinner at a restaurant, indeed, just like your damned extravagance! I warn you, Livy, that you are raising up a barrier between us that—that it will be hard to overcome."

"Why, you have been building up a barrier between us for nearly twelve years," returned his wife, in the same quiet voice, "and if you persist in bringing this man into the house you will complete it."

"What do you mean? I think you have lost your

senses!"

"I am regaining them. I have no wish to irritate you unnecessarily. But I wish you to understand distinctly that I will not receive Mr. Warden, whatever may be the consequences. If you shut your eyes to what is right, it is my duty to open them; and, pray, remember that as head of the house under you, and mother of your children, I ought to be, and I will be, a domestic power with which you must reckon."

As she said this slowly and distinctly, she looked him straight in the eyes, and from hers all the bitterness and resentment of her miserable life seemed to flash in one intense electric wave which swept down his meaner spirit, as the rising tide forces back the poor ripple of a stream.

Mr. Harding was stunned, he sat silent, openmouthed, while his wife rose and left the room, a new and agreeable sensation of relief and success thrilling

through her veins.

She had made her first stand, and never would she yield an inch again.

She had, indeed, made a deeper impression than she was aware of. Mr. Harding lit a cigar, and pondered

the whole matter profoundly.

His wife's opposition had been so astounding that his anger was stilled, and he reluctantly admitted that should they come to an open quarrel, the world would be on her side. Moreover, by a mental process very common with natures such as his, her self-assertion raised her at least twenty-five per cent. in his estimation. He was not aware of being a bad husband, he did not deliberately mean to be good or bad. He was, on the whole, rather proud of his wife, but he had failed to make a thoroughly good bargain in his marriage, for he might have had money had he looked for it. His vanity was enormous, yet uneasy, and he was absolutely stupefied in some directions with selfishness. Still the world's opinion had great weight with him, and he felt it would not do to quarrel openly with Livy. Some extraordinary devilish spirit of obstinacy had seized her, probably it would not last, and then she would be sadly (he thought "dully") submsisive as ever; meantime it would not do to make a row in that little gossiping place, so he pulled out his pencil and note-book, and finally fell asleep over a calculation of what a dinner at Verey's would cost for three.

The next morning was bright and sweet, a faint silvery haze hung over the distant uplands, and a delicious crispness gave indescribable life to the air. Having accomplished her usual morning tasks, Mrs. Harding put on her hat and strolled through the garden to the road, and so on to ask news of Stasie at Limeville.

She had heard no more of the projected, dinner from her husband. He had said very little, but he had not been actively rude, and

she thought gravely of her position, and how to make the best of it. She had quite lived through the intolerable bitterness of finding out on what merest, coarsest clay the pleasant outside coloring of her husband's bonhommie, frank hospitality, and manly simplicity were lacquered. She had gradually hardened in the cruel fire of experience from the loving sensitiveness which shrunk from a harsh word as from a blow to a quiet cynicism which was nearly impervious; but nothing could efface the strong necessity of circumstances which demanded that for her children's sake she should no longer lie helpless at their father's feet to be trampled on. This conviction had been growing on her, but was suddenly brought into active motive power by Brooke's energetic counsels. She found, too, on looking into her own heart that time had been forging weapons for her. With the shield of indifference, the spear of true, fearless words, the reserve force of selfreliance, she was prepared for conflict. But what a life, what a destiny hers had been! Nearly twelve years of loneliness, of repression, of harshness and contempt, varied by fits of fondness, degrading and loathsome in their unreasoning contrast, for what? to weld and fuse the ingredients of her nature to a temper fitted to struggle for bare existence? What had she done to deserve it?

Conscience answered "nothing;" she had simply made the ordinary everyday error of mistaking shadow

for reality.

How much more bitterly ignorance or innocence is often punished than crime; under the terrible rule of law there is no mercy, and the high court of equity has but a limited jurisdiction in life. She was little over thirty; many a long year in all probability stretched its weariness before her. It was an arid outlook, but not quite denuded of verdure. She had the future of her children to live for and in. For their sakes she must be brave and strong. That she could raise or improve her husband she never now hoped

for an instant; there was in him no material to work upon; but she began to believe that he might be kept in better order. She quite longed to be able to tell Jim Brooke of the success attending her first attempt. "Miss Stretton is working in the morning-room 'm,"

said the servant who opened the door.

"Do not disturb her; ask if I may go to her there."

"Come in, dear Mrs. Harding," cried Miss Stretton, who heard her voice. "Come and look at my work."

Mrs. Harding found her tied up in a large coarse apron, a huge paste-brush in her hand, a pile of bright-colored pictures on a table beside her, and in front a high screen of three panels, which she was decorating to the best of her ability.

"What do you think of it? There is a terrible draught from that large window in the drawing-room, and I thought I would surprise Stasie when she came

back."

"Very nice indeed! Do not let me interrupt you! Give me a pair of scissors. I can cut out some pictures while I talk to you," drawing off her gloves.

"Oh, thank you! You are a dear creature! there are the scissors; would you mind just cutting the foliage of 'The Lovers' Tryst' carefully. It will be a pretty contrast to this Harlequin and Columbine! one being colored and the other not is no matter; indeed, it makes a greater variety; a thing of this kind ought to be quite careless and irregular." So saying, she proceeded to affix poor Columbine and her companion in a perilous slant.

"And what news have you from Stasie?"

"Oh! excellent. I had quite a long letter from her this morning! Would you mind putting your hand in my pocket (mine are so sticky!); I think I put it in there. No! then I locked it up with the key-basket. Never mind, I can tell you all about it. She has been dining out, and making excursions, and going to croquet parties, and I don't know what; that young Pearson

seems to be down there perpetually; depend upon it, Lady Pearson knows how to play her cards! Look, Mrs. Harding, shall I put this beautiful cock with the red feathers here?"

"No, he would look as if he were perched on the

lover's head; put him a little to the right."

"Well, I fancy they are doing their best at Southsea to spoil Stasie. All that excitement and adulation really is not good for so young a girl; but she has a true noble heart; she is just as deeply interested in me, in you, every one, as if she were in some dull quiet place. Indeed, in her last she says—'every one is kind, and every thing delightful, yet I shall not be sorry to be at home once more."

"Does she say so?" observed Mrs. Harding, as she began to clip the surrounding white paper from the picture of a splendid imperial *cent garde*. "She would never write that unless she felt it, and yet there is lit-

tle to attract or amuse here."

"I am sure I don't know," returned Miss Stretton with vague mysteriousness. "There is no accounting for young girls' fancies. I shall be very glad to have her back at any rate, and I am happy to say she is ever so much better and stronger."

"I don't fancy this place agrees with her. We shall see how she is after her return. I am not sorry my cousin, Dr. Brooke, is coming to stay here, for he will be able to see more than we can, and let me know what

he thinks without alarming her."

"Dr. Brooke coming to stay down here!" cried Miss Stretton, pausing with uplifted brush in hand, in great surprise. "To stay with you, I suppose?"

"No, with his friend Mr. Robinson."

"Most extraordinary," ejaculated Miss Stretton, fastening on "Romeo and Juliet," back uppermost.

"I think it is very natural," returned Mrs. Harding calmly. "He has business in London, and I suppose it must be more agreeable for him to be with his old friend than to be alone in a lodging."

"Of course! of course, and much more agreeable to you too, dear Mrs. Harding, to have a relative near you."

"Very agreeable indeed," said Mrs. Harding uncon-

sciously.

"And pray when was this arranged?" asked Miss Stretton in a slightly peculiar tone.

"I don't know. Mr. Harding told me last

night."

"I wonder what Mr. Kharapet will say?"

"Nothing! what is it to Mr. Kharapet?" asked Mrs. Harding a little sharply.

"Well, you see Mr. Kharapet is so completely one

of us."

"I do not admit that, and even if he were?"

"Oh! I am sure it is nothing to me," returned Miss Stretton—a slippery illogical style of answer peculiar to ladies of her intellectual order, "only as Dr. Brooke's religious views are rather—confused—to say the least." She paused.

"Residence with so sound a churchman as Mr. Robinson will help to disentangle them," put in Mrs. Harding carelessly. "When does Stasie talk of re-

turning?"

"Oh, not for quite ten days more. Mrs. Dalzell, Lady Pearson's daughter, is going to give a dance, and she wishes to wait for it."

"She is right! She ought to seize what pleasure she

can, while she can!"

"Ah! my dear Mrs. Harding, pleasure is not the sole end of life."

"No, but one of its objects; can you imagine any

thing so horrible as life without pleasure?"

Miss Stretton was not fond of argument, and changed the conversation, which, however, did not

flow very freely.

"Pray come and join the children and myself at our high tea this evening," said Mrs. Harding, rising and depositing her last feat in cutting out on the table. "Mr. Harding will be very late, and the children will be delighted to see you."

"Sweet darlings! I shall be charmed!" returned

Miss Stretton.

When Brooke, the following day, conveyed himself and his personal luggage to Sefton Park, he was conscious of a little more lightness or perhaps revived strength of spirit than he had experienced since the evening on which he had suffered from the sensations we have described.

He had taken the first step in the struggle he intended to maintain against the attempt which he felt was being made upon Stasie Verner's life. He had gained a good position. He must now do his best to be wise as a serpent if harmless as a dove. He must on no account rouse Kharapet's suspicions, for the gentle Syrian, Brooke felt convinced, held the means of ending the strife at any moment he deemed necessary. Still, it was clearly his interest to work slowly.

In this lay Brooke's only hope.

Sometimes he stopped himself, and asked if it were possible that a man of Kharapet's standing and seeming could conceive and execute so base a crime? Could it be Bhoodhoos independent villainy? Might he not belong to that strange sect whose religion expressed itself in assassination? But a fanatic of this type would not cross the black water. No; he could only be a tool. Even so, how could he be so inhuman as to attempt the life of a creature who had loaded him with kindness. At this point Brooke generally checked himself for letting his thoughts wander about in a silly, sentimental, feminine style. What had he to do save with facts; and that the sweetmeat he had eaten was poisoned he did not—could not—doubt.

The day after his arrival he was early afoot, and made his way as soon as was permissible to see Mrs.

Harding.

Here both enjoyed a long and confidential talk, at least it was thoroughly confidential on Mrs. Harding's side. It was a new and delightful pleasure to her to open her heart to so safe a counsellor as Brooke. He was sympathetic, but just, and quite alive to the necessities of her position. No hard words were said of the family tyrant; but the wisest mode of dealing with him was very frankly discussed, and the friends in council agreed that the horizon showed something of a gleam of light, especially as Mr. Harding had announced that morning in a more than usually rugged and overbearing manner, that, after all, it would not do to drag men accustomed to their comforts down to a rough rascally hole like theirs, so he would just ask Warden to dinner at Greenwich or the Crystal Palace, "and be hanged to it. I wish I had never broached the subject."

Mrs. Harding wisely made no remark, and accepted the dictatorial tone with which he sought to cover

defeat, but the victory was to her.

The repose, the pure air, the sense of being on the scene of action brought a sense of relief to Brooke; and perceiving that for some reason Mrs. Harding wished him to be on good terms with Miss Stretton, which corroborated him in his own intention, he next paid his respects at Limeville, where he was on the whole well received.

Miss Stretton hated to be alone. She had the liking for men's society which most women naturally feel, but in a a stronger degree; and when "Dr. Brooke" was announced she fled away up-stairs with extraordinary agility to don a fresh and becoming contrivance of lace and ribbon—a sort of ornamental adaptation of middle age.

In the absence of Kharapet she found Brooke quite charming and entertaining, at very little cost to himself. He managed to listen to all she had to say with an air of deep interest, putting intelligent queries from time to time, which proved that he heard and understood, and collecting from her rambling discourse some gleams of additional light as to the conduct and probable views of Kharapet, which she little dreamed of

affording.

He carefully avoided mentioning Stasie's name, but did not shut his ears when Miss Stretton held forth on that topic. He was cautious when the conversation turned on Mr. Harding. Yet, prepossessed as she was with a fixed idea on that subject, Miss Stretton's imagination, rather than her observation, found in his few and guarded words "proof as strong as holy writ" of his deep and unfortunate attachment to his cousin, who, "nice and sweet as she is, is really rather imprudent," concluded Miss Stretton in her own mind.

"It is very nice for your cousin, Mrs. Harding, having you down here for a while," said Aunt Clem, as

Brooke was taking his leave.

"It is very nice for me to see a little more of her than I otherwise should, but I fancy she is so taken up with house and children that outsiders are of small importance to her."

Here his attention was attracted by something rubbing softly against his leg, and looking down, he per-

ceived Stasie's little dog.

"Hollo, Pearl?" he exclaimed, picking up the little creature. "What is the matter? You are by no

means in firstrate condition."

In truth, the dog had the indescribable rough poor look in his coat, which is a sure sign of neglect or indisposition; his eyes were inexpressibly pathetic, and the eagerness with which he whimpered and strove to lick Brooke's hands or face said as plain as a dog could say, "A friend at last!"

"He is quite well," said Miss Stretton; "but he has been a naughty disobedient dog since Stasie went away, so he has been kept down-stairs. Indeed, I am always a little afraid of him since he tried to bite poor

dear Mr. Kharapet."

"I suspect the little beggar is sick for want of sym-

pathy," returned Brooke, laughing, "let me take him out for a walk and try and get up his condition before Miss Verner comes back."

"I am sure I do not know when that will be," said Miss Stretton; "she talks of staying another fort-

night."

"And she is right; sea air will set her up. Good-

morning, Miss Stretton."

It gave Brooke a curious sense of pleasure to have Stasie's little favorite under his care. The springs of tenderness which in his character lay deep down under the superincumbent strata of pride and firmness, ambition and a thin seam of hardness, had been reached by the profound and generous pity which pierced through all. Full of thoughts respecting the task before him. of vivid memories of Stasie herself-her sweetness, her variety, her grace, and attractiveness—he strolled on and on, across the dull gray yellow of stubble fields, through plantations where the ground was red with fallen beech leaves, and over the corner of a wide breezy common. It was delicious to be in the country -the fresh crisp air gave him new vigor; he would yet come off victorious and defeat the machinations of that villain Kharapet. Here the little terrier stopped and whined.

"Ha! Pearl, tired, little chap? I have forgotten what a scrap you are." He took up the tiny creature and carried it kindly, thinking, more or less clearly, till he drew near his temporary home. "This is a great improvement on deserted London," he said to himself, as he paused where the byroad leading to Sefton Park turned off, "and at least I can enjoy it in peace while Stasic Verner is away. From what her aunt says, she is safe for at least a fortnight or ten days."

Even as the thought formed itself in his brain, a rusty-looking carriage, which he had heard approaching for some minutes, passed him, coming from Wel-

wood.

As it passed at a tolerably good pace, he could hardly believe his eyes; and yet he could not doubt, that in it sat Miss Verner and another female figure. His heart gave a great throb. Her unexpected return at the very moment he was congratulating himself on her safety at a distance seemed like an evil omen. What unlooked-for event could have driven her back into the toils?

## CHAPTER XXIX.

WHEN Lady Pearson recovered from the first stunning effect of the terrible telegram respecting her son's accident, her only thought was to fly to him as fast as express trains could carry her, and soon the whole household was preparing for her departure.

Sir Frederic had unfortunately gone from home for a few days' shooting, and young Pearson could not let his mother undertake such a journey alone.

Mrs. Dalzell therefore took charge of Stasie, and, though kind and thoughtful in spite of her own distress, made no objection to her young guest's proposal

to return home at once.

The only train by which Stasie could conveniently travel was one on the main line. It stopped at Welwood somewhere about five o'clock, and Mrs. Dalzell insisted on sending her own maid as Stasie's escort. Country telegrams were uncertain, she said, and Miss Verner must not be left to find her way alone in the dusk.

Stasie parted with sincerest sympathy and hearty regret from her kind hosts. She was deeply grieved for them. The thought of her own pleasures all cut short did not occur to her.

She kept picturing in her own mind what Lady Pearson must feel and suffer on her long sad journey. She earnestly prayed that she might find her boy not

fatally injured, and that Mr. Pearson might be able to send her a tolerably good account. With her usual impulsiveness she had begged him to let her know how his mother had borne the journey, and how they found the sufferer.

Withal, she felt a certain sense of pleasure in drawing near her home. How pleased Aunt Clem would be to see her, and what delight to describe her experiences to Mrs. Harding-almost as delightful as the experiences themselves. Then a little thought, a tiny point of interrogation lit up in her mind: was Dr. Brooke still in London, and if so, did he often come down to Sefton Park? From this, however, she turned resolutely, and began to talk to her companion as they drove homewards; thus she missed seeing Brooke, who stood aside to let the cab pass.

It was past six; the gas was lit, and tea was spread in the dining-room, where a small bright fire had been kindled just to take off the feeling of loneliness, Aunt Clem said to herself, when the unwonted sound of wheels on the gravel sweep before the front door arrested her hand as she was about to measure out the tea, and Mary's as she was hanging the kettle-stand on

the bar of the grate-

"Good gracious! What can it be, Mary?" ejacu-

lated Miss Stretton, not without alarm.

"Goodness knows, 'm; there is the bell, and Bhoodhoo's out, or he might be a help," replied Mary, who probably thought "a man's a man for a' that," whatever his color, in a moment of danger.

"Go see who it is," rejoined Miss Stretton with

composure.

Mary disappeared, and soon a cheerful cry of "Law'm, here's Miss Verner!" reached Miss Stretton's astonished ears.

"Stasie, my darling child! How is this? I am so glad to see you; and who——" a pause.

"Oh! this is Miss Dalzell's maid. We must make her as comfortable as we can to-night; she is to return to-morrow. Mary, take Miller down-stairs and give her a nice tea. Come in, auntie—Mary will see to the boxes—and I will tell you all about every thing."

"At all events, dearest Stasie, I am charmed to have you back so soon, whatever the reason of your coming."

Amid many ejaculations from Aunt Clem, Stasie recounted the event which led to her unexpected return.

"Poor Lady Pearson! What an awful blow!" cried Miss Stretton in a voice from which she could not banish a tone of satisfaction, so delighted was she to have her niece safe back again from the dangerous whirl of pleasure into which she had been plunged, and looking so well too—so heart-whole.

"I do hope the poor young man will recover."

"Yes, I earnestly hope he will. I dare say I shall hear something to-morrow or next day. I asked Mr. Pearson to be sure to write."

"What! to write to you?" Stasie nodded. "My love, that was scarcely comme il faut."

"I never thought about it; and in such a case it surely could not matter. How else was I to hear any thing."

"Through Mrs. Dalzell; or you might have asked

Mr. Pearson to write to me."

"Oh, auntie! that would have been too silly. I will go and take off my things, I feel so tired and dusty; I shall be quite glad of a cup of tea."

"Go to my room, Stasie, dear. Yours is all covered up. Of course, nothing is ready," called Miss

Stretton after her as she ran up-stairs.'

It was all rather bewildering to Stasie—this sudden return, this sudden dropping of a black curtain over the brightness, the movement, the soothing, flattering atmosphere in which she had lived for more than a fortnight; yet she was pleased to see how genuinely glad Aunt Clem and Mary had been at her coming. It was really like coming home to find faces brightening at sight of her; then, finding herself in the familiar room made her think of the wonderful improvement in her own health.

How strong and well she felt! all her accustomed hopefulness and sense of physical ease had come back to her. The delicious sea air had set her up. True, she would miss the gayety of her surroundings to-morrow; but there would be Mrs. Harding to talk to; perhaps Dr. Brooke might come down sometimes, and that would be a variety—at least he had always something to say that was worth hearing. If she were only on sufficiently intimate terms with him to question him on many topics she longed to talk about, how much she would gain! but she was not, and she feared to bore him.

It was not worth while to do her troublesome hair over again, she would go to bed early, and have it properly brushed out, so she smoothed it over, or tried to do so, pulled the lace round her neck straight, and went away to join her aunt.

On opening the dining-room door, to her great surprise, a tall gentleman was standing face to face with Aunt Clem, to whom he was saying, "so I took the

liberty of coming in to assure myself."

"There she is to answer your queries," replied Miss

Stretton, who was still decked in smiles.

The next instant Stasie's hand was in Dr. Brooke's. She was startled by the eager questioning of his eyes, as he looked into hers, and seemed to search into her soul. She was girlishly annoyed that her hair was in such disorder, that her dress was not carefully arranged. She did not think how sweet and fair she seemed to him, with the renewed color of health on her cheek, and the rich confusion of her golden brown hair.

"How is it you are here?" cried Stasie in frank surprise, and in no way confused by his gaze, which was simply anxious—not tender or admiring, or in the

faintest degree lover-like.

"I was walking on the Welwood Road," he returned, "and caught sight of you as you passed. I could hardly believe my eyes. I know you were not ex-

pected for some time, so I ventured to call in order to

allay my curiosity."

Stasie explained the cause of her return, and, while she spoke, the whining and scratching of Pearl attracted her attention.

"You little dear!" catching him up, "I am ashamed of myself. I quite forgot to ask for you. Poor Lady Pearson's trouble put nearly every thing else out of my head."

"I did not fancy Pearl looked very flourishing, and I took him out for a walk," said Dr. Brooke. "I fear I made him go too far; he was evidently tired, so I

carried him home."

"How good of you!" said Stasie. "Do you know, I do not think Pearl's coat looks as nice as when I left. I am afraid he is not a favorite with you, Aunt Clem."

"Will you not join us at our evening meal, Dr. Brooke?" asked Aunt Clem, blandly.

"No, I thank you; I cannot stay. But I must congratulate you, Miss Verner. I see that change has worked wonders for you. You look like what you were when we first met—ages ago, was it not? That is, four or five months ago. Yet it seems in some strange way a cycle—at least to me."

"And to me, too, but then the change from school accounts for that. Yes, I am much better—quite well,

in fact."

"We must see that you do not fall back," returned Brooke. "I have a strong impression this place does

not suit you."

Here the door opened to admit Bhoodhoo, who brought the toast-rack, and advanced with a low salaam, a joyous expression beaming on his dark face, and glittering in his black eyes.

"Good evening, Bhoodhoo, have you been quite

well?" said Stasie kindly.

"Quite well, but much better now since missee Sahib come back! No sunshine when missee away. No curries to make—nothing!" "Thank you, Bhoodhoo! You must make me a currie to-morrow."

"I will, missee, beautiful good currie;" and with another salaam Bhoodhoo retreated.

"I really think poor Bhoodhoo is quite fond of me,"

said Stasie, looking after him with a smile.

"He ought to be," remarked Aunt Clem solemnly, "and he is certainly very useful." Brooke said nothing. He seemed to Stasie plunged in a sudden fit of

deep thought.

In truth he was for a moment silenced, overwhelmed by a horror that laid its sudden grip upon him, as Bhoodhoo approached Stasie with his soft false smile, and she was so bright, so kind, so unsuspecting! Had she indeed recovered her full strength only to come back into the jaws of death? and he, great heavens! how helpless, how very nearly helpless he was to save her!

A cold ripple shivered through his veins, and it was with an effort he roused himself to bid both ladies good evening. "I shall see you to-morrow if I may call," he said. "I should like to hear some account of your plunge in the gay world, Miss Verner."

"Well, auntie," said Stasie after he had gone, as she stirred her tea meditatively, "if I have recovered since I saw Dr. Brooke, I think he has fallen off. Does he

not look very ill?"

"One does not notice a change much in those sort of thin, dark, grave men, but now you mention it, he does look ill."

"But how does he happen to be here, auntie, so late,

and——'

"My dear, it is all rather mysterious! He is staying with Mr. Robinson, actually living there; and what attraction a place of this sort can have for a man of the world like Dr. Brooke, who is fond of his club and men's society, and is quite different from Mr. Robinson (indeed, I cannot understand how they are such friends)—what attraction Sefton Park can have for

such a man, I cannot imagine. In short, there can be but one."

"And that?" asked Stasie, though she felt pretty

sure what the answer would be.

"Well, my dear, it is with great reluctance I say it, and I am sure a breath of such a suspicion should never cross my lips to mortal save yourself, but I cannot help seeing that Dr. Brooke is deeply attached to Mrs. Harding. Mind, I do not accuse her of encouraging him! She may be unconscious (though I doubt it!) but I have not the smallest doubt that this wonderful friendship with Mr. Robinson is just to get near her; and his great interest in your health! it is all part of a plan; and my own real opinion is that

the sooner he goes back to India the better!"

Stasie mused. What more likely than that the old tenderness for his charming cousin should have revived with fresh vigor, especially when he perceived the terrible life of isolation and repression to which she was doomed! That she was conscious of any thing save simple kindly friendship, for which she was innocently grateful, nothing would ever make her (Stasie) believe. But Brooke? how would it be with him? He must be very unhappy. Ah! how sweet to have the disinterested, faithful devotion of a strong thoughtful man such as he was. "I think, auntie, you must imagine a great deal. Pray, pray be prudent. I am as sure as that I live that Mrs. Harding does not for a moment dream of any thing save the purest, simplest friendship."

"We will hope so, at any rate," said Miss Stretton

with prudent reservation.

Stasie took her tea in silence, while Aunt Clem, thinking that her niece was really improved in habits of attention, continued to pour forth a vast quantity of accumulated gossip. Little of it, however, reached Stasie's ears. Though she did her best to disregard her aunt's suggestions respecting Mrs. Harding and Brooke, they sank deep into her heart. Perhaps the

worn, uneasy expression she had noticed on Brooke's face was to be accounted for by some internal struggle. The idea rather recommended itself to her romantic fancy; as for any evil arising out of it, that possibility never entered her head. She pictured to herself Brooke, always silently devoted to Mrs. Harding and her children, growing renowned in his profession, returning perhaps from India ultimately a grayhaired, low-spirited, elderly gentleman, who would treat little Ethel as a daughter, and leave her heir to all he possessed.

Here the vision of Brooke, as he was in the flesh, square, erect, cool, keen, the very antithesis of every thing sentimental, rose before her, and she smiled at

her own idea.

He was not the man to waste himself in despair, or die "because a woman's fair." Yet, if he ever did love!—

Well, what was it all to her? How foolish to spend brain power in pondering these things! how weak and

dreamy she was!

"Good-night, dear Aunt Clem! It is quite nice to have a talk with you again; but I am so sleepy."

Though many an anxious, almost despairing, day and night were yet to be encountered by Brooke, perhaps none of them surpassed in torment this first plunge into the reality of his position. To think that he was obliged to leave Stasie without warning, without an attempt to preserve her, at the mercy of that wretched tool of Kharapet's (Heaven alone knew what devilish decoction he might not be at that moment brewing to sap his young mistress's life), was almost unbearable. That unforeseen circumstances should have so favored Kharapet's design as to cut short the breathing space of safety on which he had reckoned seemed an indication full of evil omen. How should he shape his course?

Then Stasie herself, once more blooming with the perfect health he so much admired, so bright, so kindly, had deeply and freshly touched him. The conviction that through him was her sole means of escape, that he was her only efficient protector, affected him powerfully. He was resolved to win her if possible; and so, resigning all effort at self-mastery, he permitted his thoughts to dwell upon her, living over again each moment he passed with her since her indescribable reserve had begun to pique his curiosity.

What a task lay before him! Stasie was no mere romantic schoolgirl, to be had for the asking! And, after all, might she not prefer the youth and brightness of young Pearson, which resembled her own? Even that he could bear, maddening as it would be to give her up to another; but could he be sure her marriage would take place in time to prevent the completion of Kharapet's intended crime? But he knew it would not. The guardian's consent must be obtained, and the guardian was wandering in inaccessible places even then. Pearson might easily be induced to wait six months—a year—and before the expiration of that period Stasie would be in the cold grave.

Her only safety lay in marriage, immediate marriage with himself. And he must work alone unaided, unless, indeed, he could secure an ally in Sir Harcourt

Filmer!

"My dear Brooke, what is the matter? You have been pacing the room for the last half hour and more, with the aspect of a man 'on desperate deeds intent."

"I beg your pardon, Robby; I am afraid I am any thing but a cheerful visitor. I did not know I wore such a villainous aspect. The fact is, I have a good deal to think about just now; it is not easy to make up one's mind on a question of great importance without a good deal of reflection"—he paused—"and reflection will come, in and out of season. Come, Robinson, do you ever play cards or chess or hum-

bler backgammon? I don't want either to talk or think."

"I have a chess-board and men, but I am a most indifferent player. If you are one of those impatient fellows that cannot put up with mediocrity you will be smashing the board after a short trial of me."

"No, I shall not!" returned Brooke, smiling; "patience is a special virtue of mine. I have carefully cultivated it, and I do not think you will find me a

formidable antagonist to-night."

They played for some time in silence, but Robinson observed that Brooke's thoughts were not on his game; he even lost with equanimity beyond what might have been expected even from a patient man. The second game was drawn out to a great length, but Brooke was the victor. He made no attempt to replace the pieces; and Robinson, who was quite proud of having held his own so well, asked if they should try for a conqueror.

"No, thank you! You are quite my match, Robby, to-night, at least." Robinson proceeded obediently

to put the pieces away.

"When did you say Kharapet was coming down here?" asked Brooke suddenly, as if out of his thoughts.

"I do not know exactly. Miss Stretton mentioned

that he would come when Miss Verner returned."

Brooke growled something inarticulate, but not amiable. "I am often surprised that enlightened men like yourself have such strong prejudices on the subject of race and color," said Mr. Robinson in reply to the growl. "You bristle up at the sound of Kharapet's name; now he really is a very nice fellow."

"But I am not prejudiced," returned Brooke. "I think I know Easterns pretty well, and I like them better than most Englishmen do. They have many good points we do not possess; they are sympathetic and full of tact—an admirable quality, which ought to rank higher than it does; then their intelligence is of a

high order, though molded on very different lines from ours; their heads are very differently shaped; still I can get on with Easterns, but I dislike Kharapet, individually; I distrust him, and I would not have you too trusting, Robby——"

"But how could he hurt me?" exclaimed Robinson.
"He couldn't rob me, for I have no money to lose, and

I don't suppose he would murder me, eh?"

"No," said Brooke slowly, as if to himself. "No,

there is nothing to gain in murdering you."

"I protest you are too bad, Brooke!" cried Robinson, laughing. "Have some brandy and soda, and let us go to bed."

The morning light brought renewed courage and resolution to Brooke. He must keep his head clear, his nerves steady, or he could do nothing. He went early into town, traveling in the same carriage with Mr. Harding, who was quite cordial and talkative on various subjects, and finally invited Brooke to take "pot luck" with him the following day.

The object of Brooke's visit to London was to ascertain if Sir Harcourt Filmer had returned to town, and if not, when he was expected to return. Sooner or later, he must have recourse to the aid of the great M.D. He, at least, with his wide experience, would enter into Brooke's terrible suspicions—nay, certainty—and help him. He longed intensely to be able to speak to some one of the load which oppressed him.

But Filmer was still absent, and not expected back

for a week or ten days.

There was nothing for it then but to be brave, self-reliant, guarded. Whatever Kharapet's ultimate designs, he would not dare to execute them quickly.

Meanwhile, Stasie was away as soon as breakfast

was over to enjoy a long talk with Mrs. Harding.

The children at the sound of her voice broke bounds and rushed out of the schoolroom to greet her, followed by Mademoiselle, who considered Mees Verner charmante.

"How pretty the park is looking!" cried Stasie, throwing aside her hat, as, the children having been recaptured, she settled herself for a nice long confidential talk with Mrs. Harding. "The trees look so rich and lovely after Southsea, which is very bare! But oh! was it not unfortunate that poor Frank Pearson met with that accident? It must have been a bad one, or they would not have telegraphed for Lady Pearson. Oh! Mrs. Harding! if you had seen the expression of her face! so terror-stricken, so strained, and think of the hours she must travel before she can know the truth about him! I am afraid I should bear up very badly if such a trial came to me; it is dreadful to be cowardly, and yet I do not think it is cowardice altogether."

"No, I do not think it is," said Mrs. Harding, smiling kindly. "I don't think you would fail at a pinch. But it was rather a pity that all your enjoyment was

cut short."

"Yes! I am selfish enough to think of that too, but I am not sorry to be back with you, dear Mrs. Hard. ing, and poor Aunt Clem! she was so delighted to see me! Yet life was uncommonly pleasant at Southsea; every one was so bright and easy, perfectly polite, and not a bit stiff; and I was quite spoiled, or would have been if I had not been well snubbed by dear Mrs. Mathews and the boys in my early days; it would take a great many fine speeches to persuade me I am an angel in the teeth of such recollections; yet I think all did like me"-a long pause, Stasie gazing, thoughtfully out of window at the lovely tints on the trees of a thicket in the hollow below the house. Then she resumed: "Tell me, dear Mrs. Harding, for I think you see things very clearly, were I quite poor, that is like dear Ella Mathews, I mean Mrs. Baldwin, do you think they would all make such a fuss about me? Aunt Clem says things every now and then that make me feel vexed and disgusted. Surely some people would

love me, even if I had nothing."

"They would undoubtedly, dear," cried Mrs. Harding with warmth. "I should, and I believe your aunt herself would, and many others; but I doubt if people generally would make a fuss about you. Lady Pearson is a kind good woman, and is, I dare say, genuinely pleased with you, but she would not ask you to her house and encourage her son to be with you perpetually if she did not think you would be a good match for him. This is only natural; you need not quarrel with her for that."

"I suppose not," said Stasie, her big wistful eyes glittering with something very like unshed tears. "And Van Pearson, would he be as pleasant and obliging and as ready to do every thing in the world for me if I were

quite poor."

"Oh! he might. He seems a nice, honest young fellow, and I suppose has a young man's weakness for a handsome girl; but—had you not possessed the means of entering society on the same footing as himself, why—you would probably never have met, and if you had, prudence would have kept him from cultivating the acquaintance. Mr. Pearson will want more money than his father can leave him."

There was another pause, while Stasie managed to swallow her tears, for she had broached a subject that

troubled her occasionally.

"Don't let me put you against young Pearson," resumed Mrs. Harding. "I like him, and I do not think (so far as I can judge) he would marry any woman he did not like, or let us say love, merely because she had money; but he cannot marry without it."

"How horrible and degrading it must be to be married only for one's money!" cried Stasie, with a

sparkle of scorn in her eyes.

"It is quite as degrading to be married only for one's beauty, or what a man considers one's beauty," returned Mrs. Harding. "It is a charm that soon

vanishes, and then," she paused expressively—Stasie was silent. "I like Mr. Pearson, and I think he is very fond of you, Stasie; do not mislead him, dear. I do not mean to insinuate that you are a coquette, but-you may be thoughtless."

"Do you mean to say I could ever think of marry-

ing Van Pearson?"

"You might do worse," returned Mrs. Harding,

with a slight sigh.

"Why, my dear Mrs. Harding, he is a mere boy. He hasn't as much sense as I have myself. He ought not to think of marrying for seven or eight years."

"He is twenty-five or twenty-six—years older than

you are."

"That is of little consequence when I don't feel one bit of respect for him. He is nice. I like him very, very much; but I will mind what you say, for I should be so sorry to disappoint him. I wish people were not always thinking of marrying me. Aunt Clem is perpetually talking of it, and even you, who are so kind and sensible, here you are holding forth on the same topic."

"My dear Stasie, you led me into it yourself. I believe that being free, and well off, your best course would be to keep so."

Stasie was silent for a moment, and then said softly and deliberately, "No, I do not fancy a lonely, selfish life. I should like to marry, but not for some years a good many years. Dear Mrs. Harding, I am very happy in general, and I know I ought to be; but at times, not often, I feel a strange bitter pang when I think how lonely I am, for I belong to no one, and no one belongs to me. I often wish I could have staid with the Mathewses; and then when I was ill, before I went to Southsea, I used to have such curious fits of despair. Do you know, I felt very ill sometimes. But now I am well and strong; all this has passed away, and I see how thankful I ought to be to have kind friends, and enough money and health. You will

think me foolish; indeed I feel I am, but-" she

stopped abruptly, blushing and smiling.

"No, dear, not foolish; only liable to low spirits like other people when physically out of sorts. Don't dwell on such moods, they will come; just put them aside and forget them as fast as you can."

Stasie jumped up, gave her a kiss, and, returning to her seat, obeyed at once by starting a fresh subject.

"I found poor, dear Pearl looking very ill. I am afraid he is not a favorite of Aunt Clem's since he snapped at Hormuz Kharapet. How good it was of Dr. Brooke to take the little creature for a walk!"

"Yes, he has a wonderfully kind heart under a somewhat cold exterior. I am very pleased he has come down here to stay, though it surprises me a good deal."

"He likes to be near you, I suppose," said Stasie, feeling as if her question was so deeply Jesuitical that

she ought to be ashamed of herself.

"No doubt he does," replied Mrs. Harding calmly.
"Still that does not seem to me a sufficient reason. I think he is anxious and undecided about returning to India."

"Yes, he has a sort of careworn look. Do you think you could come with me for a long walk, Mrs. Harding, after luncheon to-day, round by Welwood and the Common?"

"I might be able, if I can finish some letters Mr.

Harding left me to copy by two o'clock."
"I will come and see," replied Stasie; "but I must run away now."

## CHAPTER XXX.

THE days which immediately followed Stasie's return were very pleasant ones to her, and to Brooke also they were sprinkled with happy moments when the sweetness of a first real passion—a passion purified by true tenderness-made him forget his haunting fears.

He was usually occupied in the mornings with a work he was preparing on some physiological subject of importance, and which he hoped might lay the foundation of future fortune, but the bright, crisp autumnal afternoons were spent walking or driving with Mrs. Harding and Stasie through the pleasant picturesque country roads and lanes, and over breezy com-

mons which were in the neighborhood.

Kharapet's visit, which he had dreaded, made little difference to this mode of existence. The Syrian was very quiet and gentle, and scrupulously avoided any thing like interference with any one. He was quite friendly to Brooke, who felt compelled to accept his advances with seeming readiness. The smoothtongued, dark-eyed Hormuz held in his cruel grasp a tremendous weapon, the power of life or death over a creature who was rapidly twining herself with Brooke's every hope and anticipation. Any evidence of suspicion on his part would only increase Stasie's danger. Often Brooke's self-control was put to a terrible test. when perhaps the little circle of intimates were gathered in Miss Stretton's drawing room of an evening, and Bhoodhoo would appear in his smartest clothes to wait specially on Stasie. Every cup of tea or coffee he handed to his kind young mistress sent a cold shiver of dread through Brooke's veins. God only knew what deadly mixture it contained! Only when Aunt Clem made tea in the room did he feel at ease. With what intense observation he watched Stasie, and each night as he was able to tell himself that he could see no change in the expression of her eyes-no acceleration of breathing-no irritability of manner-he thanked heaven and took courage. Time-time was all he asked-time to win her! How he burned to carry her away from all danger, to watch and tend her himself, to pour out all the passion that swelled his heart, to waken the love that lay dormant in her rich,

generous nature, which some mysterious influence seemed to have, not hardened against, but veiled from him.

His very absorption in her, his deep serious anxiety, were drawbacks to his progress as a lover. He was too grave, too preoccupied for those slight, graceful contagious indications of feeling that delicately suggest to a girl delicious possibilities of loving and being loved. Yet Stasie deeply enjoyed her walks and conversations with him. His gravity—the long, earnest, wistful looks she caught at times fixed upon her-interested her in spite of her firm resolution to be neither weak nor credulous. Brooke's preoccupied and at times even melancholy manner she accounted for by supposing him warmly attached to his cousin, and depressed by the hopelessness of her fate, the unhappiness of her ill-assorted marriage. Still, there were little incidents in their daily intercourse which sometime startled other ideas from their slumbers in the inner depths of her heart. The eager haste with which he caught her once when her foot slipped in getting over a stile—the strong throbbing of his heart when for a moment she was held against it—the magic revelation of his lingering touch, if by accident their hands met—all these "trifles light as air" disturbed Stasie at intervals, though she kept her self-mastery with wonderful strength for so young a creature. She was in some indescribable way aware that she must not, dare not, yield to the longing that would spring up at the least relaxing of the reins-the desperate longing to be all and all to the man who on the slightest deviation from his severe ideal of propriety coldly backed out of the friendly intimacy which had grown between them. Her pride perpetually whispered. "Take care!"

Nevertheless, in spite of doubts and self-distrust it was a very pleasant time; and when Dr. Brooke forgot his troubles to talk naturally and easily, it was more than pleasant.

Meanwhile it was "fine times" also for Aunt Clem. Kharapet was devoted to her, and Brooke for his own reasons showed her much polite attention. She rose, therefore, considerably in her own estimation (being unprovided with any scale of self-measurement, she generally adopted that of her associates), so all went well and tranquilly. No signs of disturbance such as he had before witnessed in Stasie appeared to arouse fresh terror in Dr. Brooke; he was almost disposed to hope that Kharapet had renounced his murderous design, or could it be an independent villainy of Bhoodhoo's? This notion had presented itself before, and been rejected.

Stasie's uneasiness respecting Lady Pearson and her son had been early relieved by a letter from her Lancer friend, who was happy to report his brother's injuries not so serious as at first supposed. His leg was broken and he was much bruised, but with good nursing they hoped all would go well. Of course Lady Pearson would take the invalid to their house in town; so the Southsea episode was over, but would long dwell in the writer's memory. His leave would soon expire, and then he hoped to see her again, as the detachment would probably remain some time longer at Hounslow.

"I shall be quite pleased to see him," said Stasie to her aunt when she had finished reading aloud this epistle. "You don't know how nice he was in his mother's

house!"

"Oh! I dare say," rejoined Miss Stretton; "but he has not the solidity of Dr. Brooke, nor the gentle unobtrusive kindness of Mr. Kharapet, the beauty of whose character grows upon one more and more." It was Miss Stretton's misfortune that she never could let well alone, nor listen to a eulogium on any one obnoxious to herself without uttering a qualification or a protest.

These little follies irritated Stasie like the bites of a

midge, and had Aunt Clem been wealthy and strong she would have received some very rasping replies; as it was, Stasie was far too chivalrous by nature to hurt what was weaker than herself, and generally met these

small stings with silence.

Kharapet had spent a few days at Sefton Park, chiefly occupied in overlooking Aunt Clem's accounts, and putting them straight, creeping slowly round the garden, or through the kitchen and pantry, to talk with Bhoodhoo, who was profoundly respectful, smoking the pipes which that accomplished native contrived to "make" in spite of many difficulties, or playing draughts of an evening with Miss Stretton. He seemed tranquil and content; moreover, to Stasie's infinite relief, he appeared to have dropped all lover-like pretension; still her original hearty liking for him never returned, but on the surface they appeared as good friends as before. Kharapet was almost ostentatiously careful not to interfere in any way with Stasie's plans or movements, and occasionally, when Brooke went over to tea or luncheon at Limeville, Kharapet took the opportunity of enjoying a tête-à-tête discussion with Robinson on Biblical history and criticism. Indeed his society was very precious to the young incumbent, only at times he suggested uncomfortable doubts regarding passages which had previously seemed clear as light; still, except to Mr. Robinson and Miss Stretton, his departure was a relief. But only in a slight degree to Brooke, who felt that his presence or absence had but little effect on Stasie's safety. He found himself counting almost the hours, and congratulating himself that he had not as yet observed any change in the eyes he watched so eagerly, yet furtively. How he longed to hold fast the soft pinky white hand given to him at least once every day, and gather from the pulse some idea of the hidden action of heart and blood!

It was a couple of days after Kharapet's departure. Brooke had been in London during the morning, and hurried back with his usual fear of finding "something

wrong" on his return, which generally grew upon him when absent for a few hours. He stopped at the parsonage to leave some books he had brought with him, and then, armed with an illustrated paper as an excuse, he called at Limeville. Both ladies were out, the servant said; they had driven over to Welwood with Mrs. Harding, she believed. Brooke left his paper, and strolled on to the top of the hill, feeling unreasonably disappointed. The Hardings' house was quiet, no shrill joyous voices sounded from the garden or yard. He paused a moment to look at the pleasant view over the downward sweep of woodland, with a church spire in the blue distance, and then descended the steep road which led through the side of the park as yet not built upon. It was a still, soft, gray evening, with a faint tinge of autumnal melancholy in the atmosphere. Brooke felt unaccountably depressed. What was to be the end of this terrible time of trial? Stasie had seemed in perfect health ever since her return from Southsea, though yesterday he had noticed her twice press her hand to her heart, but it might mean nothing.

Kharapet might hold his hand for a while, and then renew his attempts. Then he himself seemed to make no way with her; she kept him at a distance with a wonderful calm, a steady self-possession that paralyzed him! He was not aware that the paralysis came from the intense anxiety that blinded his eyes, and in one direction dulled his perception. Again for the thousandth time he reviewed the position. To whom dare he whisper his suspicions? Mr. Harding's cross selfishness would shut him out from the possibility of imagining any man such a cursed fool as to risk such a crime. Mrs. Harding, though she disliked the Syrian, would not for a moment believe him capable of it, nor the local doctor, nor Robinson, and Stasie herself least of all. Then what proof could he offer? Positively The effect of the helwa on himself—a dozen common-sense solutions might be offered to account for his symptoms, especially as he had swallowed

nearly all the sweetmeat left with him, only twice feeling the same kind of effect, and that in a much less

degree.

As he worked round and round the same painful circle of thought, he reached some sand-pits at the foot of the hill, and turning by a large oak-tree which overshadowed the cart track leading down to them, intending to take a pathway through the fields to the Welwood Road, he came suddenly upon Stasie Verner and paused to contemplate her strange employment.

Beside the road or rather track sprang a plentiful crop of nettles, and browsing upon them was a very miserable donkey, with desponding ears and a helpless-looking tail which he feebly twitched, trying to scare away the flies attracted by an open sore beside his backbone. Stasie had laid down her sunshade and a little basket full of ferns which she had been uprooting, and was carefully laying a large cool dock leaf over the place, speaking tenderly to the wretched animal, who ate on unmoved. Brooke stood still a moment to look on, half touched, and not aware that she perceived him, until without any greeting she said, "Do you think it will stick on?"

"I am afraid not, though it appears to adhere to the

broken skin at present."

"Well, it will give the poor thing a little relief, and when night comes those horrid flies will not bite!" so saying, with a parting pat to the donkey, she took up her basket and sunshade, and turned her steps towards home.

"I heard you had all gone over to Welwood," said

Brooke, keeping by her side.

"Mrs. Harding, Aunt Clem, and the children have; I only went as far as Ashby woods, and came through them to get these ferns; there are quantities of ferns there, and, I imagine, heaps of wild flowers in the spring.—It will be delightful to walk there if we are still here."

"Where do you think you will be?"

"I have no idea—somewhere—any where. I think

often I should like to have wings, to be perpetually in motion—it is a curious feeling," and she looked up at him with a smile.

Good God! with a wild pang of horror he observed that her eyes had something of the enlarged strained look he so dreaded. Her manner, too, was less calm; the way in which she played with the tassel of her sunshade seemed to him suspiciously restless and uneasy.

"It was a long lonely walk for you, Miss Verner;

you ought to have had a companion."

"There is nothing to fear, except, they say, at the

race time; then London tramps come about."

"Why did you not send for me? I am an idle man now and very glad to be of use." He could hardly command himself to speak in his natural voice. He longed to clasp her to his heart, to implore her to let him take her away that very instant from danger, from death!

"Oh, I could not think of troubling you," said Stasie, little dreaming the struggle going on in her companion's heart. "You would not care to wander

about woods rooting up ferns."

"Yes, I should," returned Brooke rather abruptly; "men of my calling are given to botanize, 'to cull simples,' as old-fashioned romances term it, and—and—at all events, now that we are good friends (are we not, Miss Verner?), I like a talk and an argument, as we used to have, four ages,—that is, four months ago,—even when I get the worst of it."

"But you never do get the worst," replied Stasie, laughing, "for even when I feel I am right, I never

know how to prove it."

Thus talking, with frequent pauses, for Brooke recovered himself but slowly, they reached the house.

Brooke hesitated, "I left an Illustrated London News

Brooke hesitated, "I left an Illustrated London News for you just now," he said; "there are one or two admirable pictures of Welsh scenery in it. I should like to show them to you."

"Oh, come in," said Stasie, quite at her ease. "Aunt Clem will soon be back, and we are going to dine at Sefton House. Is it not a grand name for an old homestead?"

Brooke did not need a second invitation, and followed her into the drawing-room, where they found Bhoodhoo apparently occupied in sweeping up the hearth. Stasie gave him her basket and her hat; then, sitting down as if tired on the sofa by the fireplace, drew her little work-table to her, and, leaning her elbow on it, she said, "What a good useful creature Bhoodhoo is! He saves the other servants so much! he thinks of every thing; I do believe he has been putting my work in order."

"Do you keep your supply of Syrian sweetmeats at

hand there?" asked Brooke sharply.

"Sometimes," she returned, looking up much surprised.

"Have you any there now?"

"I had a few, but I see Bhoodhoo has put some

more;" she took a piece and offered it to him.

"Give them all to me," cried Brooke, drawing a chair close to her, and gazing into her eyes as though he would pierce through the fleshly vein into the depths of her being. "I see that you have been eating this horrible stuff! Promise me you will not! You cannot hide from me that you are not yourself—not quite well."

"Do not look at me like that, Dr. Brooke," she exclaimed, covering her face with her hands. "I cannot bear it. I will not have you cross-examine me You frighten me. You make me feel ill and uneasy. There is nothing the matter—only—only the place does not agree with me. I will go away, I will take Aunt Clem; we can go for the winter to the seaside, or—you do not think I am seriously ill?" with a sudden change of tone.

"I would not frighten you for worlds," said Brooke, lowering his voice, and speaking with a tender-

ness of tone that stirred Stasie's heart strangely. "And, so far as I can judge, you have magnificent health; but just now you should be careful. You should have advice; you do not wish for mine; let me entreat you to consult a man of the highest skill, whose advice will, in all probability, enable you to overcome these unpleasant symptons. Tell me, I beg you, this: have you felt your heart beat quickly, so quickly for a few moments that you feel breathless?"

"Not so bad as that; but yesterday I fancied it did beat faster than usual, and last night I could not sleep. Now, do not ask me any more questions, and do not think me rude," she went on in her most serious tone, all playful petulance banished. "If I do not want you to be—that is, to prescribe for me—I am sure you are very clever, very; but you see you are a friend whom I meet every day, and if you were my doctor too I should always fancy I was very ill, or getting worse, or something of that kind, every time you looked gravely at me; and you look awfully grave

sometimes, Dr. Brooke, almost unhappy."

"Almost!" repeated Brooke, "altogether!" The words escaped his lips before he was well aware of them. Perhaps they might produce an effect favorable to his object in arousing Stasie's notice of her own health, her interest in himself. There was an indescribable, sweet frankness in her voice and manner as she excused herself for not seeking his professional aid; a dim delicious idea suggested itself that her reluctance to accept him as a physician might arise, perhaps, out of the natural shrinking of a delicate girl from those undraped communications which the relation of patient and doctor compel, but which any dawning of warmer feelings forbid. If she could but love him the battle would be won. He had almost unconsciously risen and paced the room while he thought. Stasie watched him with wondering eyes. What could disturb him? What could make him "altogether" unhappy?

"I quite understand you," he said, returning to his seat. "Many persons have a nervous dislike to the doctor's presence, save when it is absolutely necessary. I do not wish to intrude upon you; but, in an outside way, let me advise you to give up eating helwa and all made dishes. You are not too dainty to dine on a plain joint, I hope?" and he tried, not very successfully, to produce a playful smile.

"()h! I am not such a baby as to eat what I am told is bad for me," replied Stasie, who was much impressed with his manner. "But can there be much harm in helwa? Poor Bhoodhoo would be quite mortified if I

did not eat his sweeties."

"Do not mortify him, then. Give me some, put more in the fire, let him believe you take them; but pray give them up for a while, and let me speak to Mrs. Harding about Filmer—I mean, about your consulting a first-rate man, a friend of mine."

"Very well," returned Stasie thoughtfully. "But I do not think this place suits me; I was a different

creature at Southsea."

Brooke was so deeply conscious of this fact—so convinced in his own mind of its cause—that he did not trust himself to reply, and Stasie went on a little shyly, but always with a sweet honesty—"Do you know, Dr. Brooke, I do not think Sefton Park suits you. You look, I do not know exactly how, but worn and—and—you don't mind my saying it?—sad, melancholy, and rather stern, as if something was going wrong."

"Exactly," returned Brooke, resting one elbow on his knee, his cheek on his hand, thus bringing his eyes on a level with hers, into which he gazed with a look so somber that it did not suggest any notion of a lover. "Things are going very wrong, and the place suits me

as little as it does you."

"Then why do you stay?" cried Stasie, imagining that his state of mind might be due to his affection for cousin.

"Because, though illat ease here, I should be miser-

able away." Then after a short pause he added, in a low tone, almost dreading to venture so bold an opening lest he should startle or repel her—" Sefton Park

is the world to me; I cannot leave it."

"Good heavens!" thought Stasie, in some mental excitement, "is he going to make a confidante of me? I would rather not. How nice he is, and how unfortunate!" Aloud she said, with some confusion and a vivid blush—"Yet, don't you think it would be better to go, even if it were hard to break away? At least it seems so to me."

"Does it?" returned Brooke, much struck by her words, and feeling his heart sink within him. "Nevertheless I cannot go; a sense of duty, which I must not explain, keeps me here, as well as strong inclination.

But I shall not forget your advice."

"Advice—oh! I do not presume to offer advice to you, who are so much older and wiser than I am; but there are some things in which a sort of instinct directs even a mere school-girl like myself."

"And your instinct is against me," cried Brooke, with a spasm of despair such as he never dreamed any

woman's words would have brought him.

"Against you! Oh no; I am not against you. I, if you will let me say so," said Stasie, who, when consulted or soothed, was humility itself—"I feel with you and for you, and am only grieved to think you are unhappy in any way; but I do think it would be wiser to go away." "I suppose he thinks it his duty as a relation to stop and look after Mrs. Harding," she thought, "but it is no use, and she is getting on better."

"Forgive me if I differ from you: I may be of use. I—I cannot explain to you now; but from no personal consideration, no selfish hopes, I am resolved

to remain."

"You know best," said Stasie, a little bewildered; and there was an embarrassing pause, mercifully broken by the entrance of Miss Stretton, fresh and cold from

her evening drive. She was quite empressée in her greeting of Dr. Brooke, but anxious to get away to her toilette. "Mr. Harding is so particular as to punctuality, you know, my dear," she explained to her niece; so Brooke took the hint and his leave.

But the conversation she had had with him dwelt long and vividly in Stasie's mind. She could not have believed that a man like Brooke, who had impressed upon her the idea of a will too firm, a temperament too coldly composed, to be moved by any thing short of a moral earthquake, would have been so shaken, so emotional, as he had proved himself during that intensely interesting interview. That Dr. Brooke should have attempted to confide in her was too wonderful.

After all—though, of course, it was not right to love a married woman so very much—she half envied her friend the possession of a heart so true, so disinterested. But that Mrs. Harding should ever give him a warmer than what of right belonged to a kind, sympathetic, pleasant kinsman, she never for an instant believed.

"Ah! how good Mrs. Harding is! I fear that in her place I should not be so good. Only for the chil-

dren, they are the great stay."

## CHAPTER XXXI.

This conversation produced a profound impression upon Brooke. He could not shake it off. For some

hours it filled him with despair.

He sat down to dinner with his host. He listened to his cheerful talk without hearing one word he said while he watched the blue curls of smoke from his cigar and repeated over and over again Stasie's mysterious words-"Had you not better go?" Was there then no hope for him? If so, there was little for her. Was ever man so cruelly hampered? Was ever knowledge so horribly neutralized? He felt a contempt for himself, for his own impotence. But what could he do? If he attacked either Bhoodhoo or Kharapet, the only result would be a breach, which would make him look like a fool, and deprive him of the only chance to save Stasie. In the present stage of affairs Kharapet might defy suspicion and inquiry. He knew well how the action of such a poison as he feared could be so timed as to close the drama at any moment. No! he must not let Kharapet have the smallest inkling that he was watched and suspected. Here was a position trying and difficult enough, but when Stasie, with sweet yet hesitating honesty that made his heart ache, warned him off the premises as it were, the last ingredient was added to the sea of perplexity in which he felt himself tossed to and fro.

Brooke was by nature a proud, masterful man, only preserved from an over-tendency to dominate by shrewd common-sense and a certain amount of sympathy, qualities which made him at once liked and respected by his fellows; but that he had so soft a heart had never been revealed to him till he knew Stasie Verner, and the sense of danger to her—danger known only to himself—from which he only could save her, fanned

his liking into an intense flame.

"If I could get that fellow out to drive with me," he thought of Kharapet, "I would break his neck as unhesitatingly as I would shoot a mad dog or any noxious beast, but I must speak him fair—I must not let him suppose I doubt him. And Stasie herself? What a conceited ass I was to imagine, as I did, that, on the whole, she was disposed to love me!" Then he began to ponder on her words—her manner. There was something in the latter he could not quite understand. She hesitated to pronounce his sentence of banishment, but these was none of the shrinking embarrassment that might be expected from a sensitive, warmhearted girl fencing off the first approach to a declara-

tion. Was there any misunderstanding on his part? Could he, in the strong emotion of the moment, have mistaken her meaning? He would at any rate see her to-morrow on his way to consult with Mrs. Harding whom he would take partially into his confidence, and endeavor to recover his lost ground of friendly understanding—if he had lost it.

One pin's point of hope he had gathered from their conversation; Stasie's imagination could be touched and alarmed, and she was a little uneasy at her own sensations. This might help him. But what a destiny for Stasie if driven only by fear of death to take

refuge in his arms!

"Pooh! I am growing womanish and hysterical," thought Brooke, rallying his forces; "I must keep cool and resolute: I will make my way out of this cursed deadlock, and save her too, if I have to kill those two infernal plotters with my own hand." "I say, Robinson," he exclaimed, throwing the end of his cigar into the fire, "I have rather a headache, and I am too stupid for companionship, so I will be off to bed."

As early as politeness permitted, Brooke sallied forth next day to call on his cousin. He had watched from his window till he saw Mr. Harding pass at a rapid pace to catch the nine o'clock train, which carried the bread-winners of Sefton Park cityward to their daily toil, and with some difficulty kept quiet for an hour or more with the help of a weed and the morning papers, till he thought he might venture to present himself.

He walked slowly up the road. Slackening his pace as he neared Limeville, he was devoured with the desire to understand fully what Stasie meant when she told him "he had better go." He was painfully anxious to regain the friendly footing he feared had been endangered, and he began to confess to himself that at all times he would take some trouble to rejoice his

eyes with the sight of her. On reaching the gate he saw it stood half open, and at the sound of his footsteps Pearl flew out bounding and barking the wildest welcome. Brooke stooped to caress the dog. "You must not wander away and lose yourself, you little beggar! you are much too precious." He lifted the dog as he spoke, intending to put him inside the gate and close it; but while he stroked the little creature, Stasie came quickly out of the house as though in chase of her favorite.

"Ah, Dr. Brooke!" she exclaimed, pausing as she reached the road; "you have caught that naughty little dog—he is always trying to run away." She looked bright, sunny, and, unless he was stupidly conceited,

glad to see him.

"Here is the little culprit safe and sound, Miss Verner. Who is your gatekeeper? You should insist on its being shut, or Master Pearl will break bounds on

every occasion."

"I have no such important functionary," said Stasie, laughing; "but I will ask Bhoodhoo to see it is kept closed; he is so thoughtful. Come, Pearl, you must stay at home to-day, and be brushed and made pretty, for your old master is coming to see you."

"Has Pearson returned?" asked Brooke quickly, as

he followed Stasie into the pleasure-ground.

"Yes. He sent Aunt Clem a brace of partridge last night, and a note saying he would ride over to-day. I shall be glad to hear about poor dear Lady Pearson and his brother."

Brooke was silent for a minute or two, and Stasie, the gate being shut, set down Pearl, and began to gather some of the few autumnal flowers still blooming.

"Why haven't you a shawl or something to wrap round you?" said Brooke abruptly. "The air is crisp."

"I do not need it. I am going in immediately." "Is it permitted to ask how you slept?" he continued with a smile.

"Yes," returned Stasie; "that is a common civility. I slept better than usual, and am like a giant refreshed."

"Good. I am rejoiced to hear it. Now, I will venture another question; answer me truly." His deepset eyes grew so earnest, so imploring, that they fascinated hers, "Will it annoy or offend you if I stay on here?"

"Annoy me?" cried Stasie, surprised, but not embarrassed: "no, certainly not. Why should it?"

"I do not know; only I gathered from your words

yesterday that it would be unwise of me to stay."

"Oh, yes! I remember," she said, recalling their conversation, and coloring vividly. "I am afraid I was rather presumptuous, but"—breaking off abruptly—"you know best. Let us say no more about it. How could you imagine your staying here would annoy me?"

Brooke was silent, seeking in vain for a solution of her puzzling remarks. Could it be that her fancy was disordered by the action of the poison he believed had been given her? At all events, she did not wish him to go. What could she have meant? "Then I shall certainly remain," said he at length. "And, tell me, have you been eating helwa since?"

"No," returned Stasie, raising her eyes smilingly to his, "I am quite willing to take care of myself, but I hide it away not to offend Bhoodhoo, who is so pleased

to think I like it."

"Quite right," said Brooke eagerly. "Give it to me when you want to get rid of it. See if Pearl will eat it."

"I have tried him, but he will not."

"I am going to Mrs. Harding's. I am going to suggest her consulting Filmer about you, Miss Verner.

Promise me not to resist her advice."

"I will not," said Stasie thoughtfully. "But, Dr. Brooke, tell Mrs. Harding to speak first to Aunt Clem. She likes to be first in every thing, and she is very good to me."

"And you to her, I am sure. I will remember your

hint. So good-by for the present."

He raised his hat, and walked away up the road. Stasie continued to search for and gather what blossoms were left, while she thought somewhat eagerly of the change she had suddenly become aware of in Dr. Brooke. For some reason or other he was deeply, unmistakably anxious about herself. His manner, too, had lost its calm superiority. There was a something less assured, something curiously pleading, in his eyes, his voice, that conveyed to her a subtle sense of her own importance. Why was it so? On account of her close intimacy with Mrs. Harding? It must be. Stasie had carefully ruled her thoughts, her imagination, had resisted all temptation to let either dwell on Brooke, but to-day she could not. She compared him mentally to the various brilliant young men she had met while staying with Lady Pearson. How immeasurably superior he was to them all! To her the quiet strength which his tone and aspect expressed was infionitely attractive. He was so equable, so just and broad in his opinions; and although his composure might seem cold, she had a conviction that beneath it was a deep spring of warm sympathy for the few he loved. Then, to her inexperience, he seemed to know every thing. Why, it was wonderful that he should take as much interest as he did in a mere half-instructed girl like herself, especially as at first she must have seemed but too ready to worry him with her questions and her company. For though full of high and gallant spirit, Stasie had a genuinely humble opinion of herself, and shrunk from the idea of thrusting herself forward, as she would from a blow. Was Dr. Brooke in love with his cousin, as Aunt Clem thought? It was impossible to say!

Meanwhile Brooke went on a little more at ease, from Stasie's frank assurance. He found Mrs. Hard-

ing busy over her house accounts, and alone.

"Don't let me disturb you," he said. "I will go

smoke my cigar under the lime-trees. Send for me when you can spare a few minutes; I want to talk

with you."

It was a crisp gray morning, and as Brooke loitered to and fro in a little grove of limes which sheltered one end of the house, his courage and composure seemed to return. If Stasie was quite willing he should stay, he must have entirely misunderstood her. His chief aim now must be to impress his own feelings upon her, to convey to her his hope, to win her and save her, and join to his own that young buoyant life, that tender, generous heart. What a vista of delight!

Here a servant summoned him to Mrs. Harding's presence. After exchanging a few commonplaces, she

asked—

"What did you want to talk to me about, Jim?"

He paused an instant, and then determined to be quite confidential up to the limit of the dreadful secret of his real trouble. He said in a quiet steady voice, "I am uneasy about Stasie Verner, Livy."

"Indeed!" with keenly-aroused attention. "Why,

Jim ? "

"Because I see a return of those symptoms which so alarmed us before. Believe me, she ought to have advice—the advice of a first-rate man."

"You alarm me. What do you think is the matter

with her?"

"I could not tell without going more deeply into the question than she would permit. Something perhaps of the nature of heart disease, which will not be incurable if it be not hereditary. Kharapet says her mother died of heart disease."

"I do not think she did. I perfectly remember old Mr. Kharapet describing her wasting away from continued attacks of fever, to which she finally succumbed.

No; she did not die of heart disease."

"Why does Kharapet assert it then?"
"He may have heard she did! He can have no

motive. Somehow, I always search for 'motives' with

Mr. Kharapet."

"Well, Livy, I want you to persuade Miss Verner to go to my friend Filmer. He is a profound pathologist, and if any one can do her good, he can; but get the aunt to view the matter in its true light, as of the last importance. I tell you, that sweet bright girl may slip through our fingers before we know where we are."

There was suppressed emotion in his voice. Mrs.

Harding looked up surprised.

"You are very deeply interested in Stasie, Jim."

"I am; Livy, she is every thing to me!"

"I hardly expected this," returned Mrs. Harding thoughtfully; "there is so little of a lover in your style and manner; but I am very, very glad. I love Stasie; and if any man can stand the trials and temptations of matrimony, I fancy you can. But, oh! Jim be good and kind to her."

"My dear cousin! do you think there is the faintest

hope for me?" very eagerly.

"I cannot tell—indeed I cannot; but if I could I would not."

"Why?"

"Because it would be treachery. I really think Stasie perfectly fancy free. Try, oh try, to win her!"

"I need no urging! but I fear—," he paused, and, rising, began to pace the room. "That young Pearson has returned," he resumed.

"Has he? I do not think Stasie would ever care

for him-she feels herself stronger than he is."

"He is a nice young fellow; but *he* could not save her!" said Brooke, as if to himself.

"How do you mean, Jim?"

"Nothing. If I were to succeed with Miss Verner, I suppose I should encounter a tremendous opposition from Kharapet and your husband, and, through them, from the guardian?"

"From Kharapet, yes; but I am not so sure about Mr. Harding. I am certain he dislikes Kharapet, but

does not like to show it. Still, in time you could get over all that."

"Ay, time—and time is so infinitely precious."

"But, Jim, you are quite young yet—not two years older than I am! You need not be in such a violent hurry."

"Í am though, Livy; in a most violent hurry."

"I should have thought you a more reasonable

man," said Mrs. Harding, with a smile.

"In this matter I am utterly unreasonable," exclaimed Brooke, throwing himself into his chair again, "and you must be my friend—you must help me, Livy! I do not say it from self-conceit; but I sincerely believe it will be best for Stasie Verner to marry me. If she is heart-whole I think there is a good chance for me. I do not think I should be attracted to her as I am if she did not feel a certain sympathy for me!"

"Perhaps so; but, Jim, how many men have lavished the warmest affection on women who did not

care a straw for them!"

"True; but ours—mine is no ordinary case;" this impetuously, then in an altered tone. "By Jove! I am only saying what every blockhead thinks when he first falls in love. Yet there is something more, but I cannot tell you."

"You are quite mysterious," said Mrs. Harding, smiling. "I must not flatter you by admitting there is any thing out of the common in your case, except that you are very far gone, much further than I thought."

"I could hardly be in a deeper depth," returned

Brooke; "and I claim your friendly aid."

"So far as I can, I will gladly help you, Jim; but I do not think you have much opposition to fear, except from Hormuz Kharapet."

"Has he still any hopes of success with Miss Ver-

ner?" asked Brooke.

"No; that is, he seems formally and openly to have resigned that project, but Heaven only knows what his real views are. Of one thing I am sure he will oppose her marriage with any one. He would neither like to give an account of his stewardship nor give up the manipulation of her money until compelled by her being of age."

"Three years," murmured Brooke, "and in that

. time what infinite evil might be wrought!"

"I should be very glad indeed if you and Stasie were to marry soon. She is terribly isolated, and I should like as much of her money as possible to be saved."

"So should I," returned Brooke, "for every reason, though I would gladly marry her to-morrow if she had

not a rap, imprudent though it would be."

"I believe you, Jim, but many would not. Well, count on me; so far as a third person can help, I will."

"The first thing to be done," said Brooke, rousing himself from a fit of thought, "is to induce Miss Stretton to take her niece to Filmer. Frequent short changes of scene would be useful. Not a family ex-

odus, you understand, just by herself."

After some further discussion it was agreed that Mrs. Harding should attack Miss Stretton that very day, and Brooke accepted a commission to go up to town and change a book in which both Stasie and her friend were deeply interested, for the second and third volumes, which would give him an excuse for presenting himself at Limeville in the afternoon, where Mrs. Harding promised to meet him and observe what effect Mr. Pearson's visit appeared to produce.

It was not difficult to deal with Miss Stretton. She was keenly alive to the importance of Stasie's health, and sincerely anxious to see it completely re-established. Still she evidently would not positively agree to any thing till she had consulted Kharapet. He made his appearance a couple of days later, very opportunely, as he often did when any matter of importance was

under consideration—so often that Mrs. Harding suspected Aunt Clem of daily private communication with him.

The influence of the Syrian over her was enormous, her present and future alike depended on him, she thought, and as his personal flattery grew less fine in quality as well as quantity, a little wholesome fear began to leaven her strong liking and admiration of the

gentle Hormuz.

Stasie's wrath was often raised by the tremendous fuss made by her aunt respecting Mr. Kharapet's comforts and Mr. Kharapet's favorite dishes, which were, as Mary the housekeeper remarked, "a goodish few, and wasn't it a mercy that nice obliging man Bhoodhoo was there to cook them? Such a mixing and a stewing and a simmering Susan never could manage! but bless you, he cares for nothing but to muddle among his saucepans all day long."

Whatever Kharapet's needs, however, they were elaborately supplied; and Stasie declared she felt as nothing and nobody in the house when Kharapet was

there.

On the present occasion he was peculiarly amiable,

and quite tender in his solicitude for Stasie.

He thought her not looking at all well, and heartily agreed in Mrs. Harding's opinion that the advice of a first-rate physician should be sought. Why not Sir Harcourt Filmer? He himself would have suggested the famous Dr. Carus, who always attended my Lord Saintsbury, but it was really of no importance which of these eminent men were employed. Stasie made no objection. She had been unusually quiet—even languid for the last few days—averse to take long walks and impervious to Van Pearson's compliments and sallies. She felt impatient to throw off this oppression, was full of hope for the results of consulting a new and a great doctor.

Brooke had made up his mind to keep as much as possible out of Kharapet's way; their meeting would

do no good, and the strain on his (Brooke's) self-control was too great when in the presence of a man whom

he suspected of such treachery.

He ascertained, however, from Mrs. Harding the day fixed upon for Stasie's visit to Sir Harcourt Filmer, and wrote a private note recommending her to his special attention, and begging for a personal interview subsequently.

Then he eagerly waited the result.

The afternoon on which Stasie and Miss Stretton returned after seeing the great doctor, Brooke could not refrain from loitering about the station at the time the train was due. Here to his great relief he was joined by Mrs. Harding, whose evening ramble with the children brought her that way.

She dismissed them and sat down with him on a bench outside, where from the elevated road-way there

was a pretty view over the Sefton woods.

"Their train is overdue," said Brooke, looking at his watch for the second time, after a pause in their intermittent talk.

"And you are over anxious! You are really looking ill yourself, Jim, which alarms me, not for you, but for Stasie."

He made no reply. As she spoke the expected train came round a bend of the line, and steamed rapidly into the station, overshooting the platform.

Brooke hastened to assist Miss Stretton, who went on at once to Mrs. Harding, with whom she entered into animated conversation. Stasie waited to collect some parcels, without which no lady ever returned from London to Sefton Park, and then gave Brooke her hand as she descended.

She looked pale and preoccupied, and Brooke, as his questioning eyes dwelt upon her, imagined he read disappointment in her expression. Her first words were commonplace enough. "Pray ask one of the porters to take these things across and keep them till we send down for them, and there is a small basket in the guard's van."

"I will see to it," and he left her for a moment. When he returned the train had moved on, and Mrs. Harding with Miss Stretton were already crossing the

line to the gate of exit.

Stasie was standing quite still, and gazing away over the gently-rising upland with its variegated greens and browns, crowned by woods which were in the last glories of autumnal coloring; there was a sad wistful look in her big thoughtful eyes. Brooke thought they glittered suspiciously, as if full of unshed tears. Was it possible that she had drawn some discouraging impression from her interview with Filmer? Dare he hope that his old master's wide knowledge and professional acumen had detected something of the truth?

"Miss Stretton has gone on," he said.

"Oh, yes; I am coming," said Stasie in a dreamy

voice, and began to follow slowly.

Brooke was burning to question her, yet hesitated how to begin. After a few steps in silence, Stasie exclaimed, "I am so tired."

"Are you?" cried Brooke; "would you like to sit down here, while I get the pony and trap from the

railway inn for you?"

"Oh, no thank you; that would be much ado about nothing," she returned with a smile, having apparently quite recovered any unusual emotion she might have felt.

"Then walk slowly, and tell me—what do you think

of Filmer?"

"I am not sure; I thought him rather grumpy at first. But, oh, what an eye he has! he looks through one."

"Doctors are bound to study a patient's physiog-

nomy."

"I suppose so; you have something of that piercingness yourself; and when you are a great doctor it will be much worse—or better," said Stasie in her natural, impulsive way.

"Am I to be a great doctor, Miss Verner?"

"Yes, I fancy you will be,"—a pause.

"And were you satisfied with your interview?" asked Brooke; he listened eagerly for her reply, which

did not come for a second or two.

"No," she said at length softly, with a touch of sadness in her voice, "not at all, rather disappointed. I did so hope for some quite new remedy, some little bit of information about myself, but he just said nothing more than poor old Mr. Hunter did; he talked of debility, and slight derangement of digestion, and gave me a prescription. We had it made up, and I believe it is just the same as Dr. Hunter gave me."

"Indeed! you must remember that doctors never

tell their patients much about themselves."

"That may be, but I am quite sure Sir Harcourt Filmer does not think there is much the matter with me. I fancied he was vexed at having his time taken up with such a mere nothing as my complaints, and I described my sensations so badly!"

"But is it not encouraging to find he thinks there is

so little the matter with you?"

"No," said Stasie, "for"—she hesitated, and then burst out with irrepressible confidence—"I am not well; I can't tell you how I feel! But his world is so lovely, and life so delightful, I want to enjoy it! I want to feel my own old self again. Why, it used to be delicious even to wake up in the morning and feel I was alive—oh, how alive."

"You shall feel it again," said Brooke emphatically, in a tone that struck to Stasie's heart. He was deeply moved. If he dared speak out to her? But the danger of it! Suppose she were averse to him in the character of a lover, would it not cut her off from all the chances of escape which her frank confidence in

him offered.

"You think I shall! ah, I hope so!"

"Miss Verner, if this prescription fails, will you let me have my innings?"

"We will see."

"Did Filmer advise change of air?"

"Not very strongly, but Aunt Clem rather caught at the idea, and has been planning an exodus of the whole household to Torquay or Bournemouth all the way back."

"That won't do! If you go you must go alone,"

said Brooke with decision.

Stasie looked at him with some surprise, and opened her lips to reply, when Miss Stretton turned back suddenly, and joined in the conversation, to assure Brooke of her great satisfaction in finding that Sir Harcourt Filmer entirely agreed with "that dear good Dr. Hunter in whom I have the greatest confidence," etc.

Brooke was, on the whole, more hopeful after this conversation with Stasie. If he could but win her confidence and steal into her regard without startling her into an attitude of self-defense, there was hope still.

That evening's post brought Brooke a note from Filmer, appointing the next day but one for the interview he had asked.

"Now for a bold stroke to secure my only chance of help. If I can convince Filmer, all may yet go well."

## CHAPTER XXXII.

WITH anxious punctuality Brooke reached Harley Street a few minutes before the hour appointed by the great doctor.

Sir Harcourt Filmer, however, was still engaged, the servant informed him; and Brooke accordingly composed himself to bide his time as best he could in the dreary waiting-room, where so many hearts had fluttered with hesitating hope, or sunk in darkest doubt.

He thought over again all he intended to lay before his former master, striving to reduce his ideas into the smallest and most compact form, consistent with clearness, that he might not occupy too many of the minutes, which were literally worth their weight in gold.

He was still marshaling his few facts, and the inferences he had deduced from them, when a door opposite opened, and the well-known physician stood on

the threshold.

"Ah! you are there, are you? Come in! Come and have some luncheon. We can talk while eating, and I shall not lose time."

He led the way through the consulting-room to a very comfortable study, where a coal and wood fire glowed in a grate of the newest and most improved fashion, and a table was laid for two.

The doctor rang sharply, and his summons was quickly responded to by a servant, who brought in the

expected luncheon.

"That will do," said Sir Harcourt, as soon as they were seated. "Put the bell by me, and you need not wait. What will you take, Brooke?"

"I do not want any thing; if you will let me talk

while you eat I should much prefer it."

"Very well. At least take a glass of wine."

"Presently, thank you."

"And now, what is it that disturbs you about the girl you sent me? I have just looked at my notes, and there is not much the matter with her."

"You think not? I am very uneasy on her account."

"I fancy she is a little out of sorts. In short, in the nervous, restless, depressed condition very common with young girls before they have attained their full strength. Do you know if any of her people had heart disease? I rather think her heart may be a little weak. The other symptoms—sleeplessness, nausea, etc., can be accounted for in various ways, none of them alarm-

ing. I have given her a few drops of tincture digitalis in combination with valerian and iron."

"You evidently see nothing out of the common in

her case?"

"Nothing whatever; and I am surprised that you alarm yourself, but I suppose you have had less to do with feminine ailments and fancies (which are often synonymous terms), than I have. I assure you, half the practice in London is made up of just such nondescript maladies as your young friend's. She is a fine

girl, though! She ought not to be ill."

"She was in perfect, almost ideal, health when I first met her about six months ago," said Brooke. "I had been away for some time, and on my return I found her greatly changed, so much so that I ventured to speak to the local man who attended her-a very sensible, ordinary practitioner. He took the same view of the case as you do. I, for special reasons, induced him to order change of air. The effect was wonderful; but circumstances occurred which obliged her to come back too soon, then all the symptoms reappeared even worse than before. I have inquired as far as I could as to the cause of her mother's death. Her aunt says it was repeated fever, while Kharapet, a Syrian, brother of her late stepfather, and one of his executors, declares he always understood that the mother died of heart disease.

"Ah!" said Sir Harcourt.

"I do not believe him, and the aunt stoutly denies it."

"Hum! The aunt is that elderly chatterbox that came with her? She has not as much brains as you could stick on the point of a needle!"

"Just the woman to be made a tool of," said Brooke

thoughtfully.

"Very likely," returned Sir Harcourt.

"You consider then that there is no cause for uneasiness—I mean Miss Verner's friends need not be anxious?" "No, certainly not. The worst symptom is her sleeplessness, but that will pass as her general health improves."

"If it improves," said Brooke very emphatically.
"What is the matter? I say, Brooke, are you sweet
on the young lady? If so, why, your judgment may not

be very sound."

"At any rate," returned Brooke, "I am very deeply interested in her, because I have a theory which I beg you to consider a professional secret."

"Out with it then! We doctors are accustomed to queer corners behind the smooth surface of society."

"I will be as brief as possible," returned Brooke. "This girl, Miss Verner, is the stepdaughter of the late British Consul at Mardīn. The old man was much attached to her, and left her all his money—a considerable sum. He named as executors, Mr. Harding a merchant of some standing, and his own younger brother, Hormuz Kharapet, a protégé of Percy Wyatt's and some of the Exeter Hall saints."

"I have met him," ejaculated Sir Harcourt Filmer.
"Well," continued Brooke, "this Kharapet has devoted himself to Miss Verner. He is or was madly in love with her. She has rejected him,—that is, I am almost sure she has,—but he still hangs about her. She lives a short way out of town with her aunt, who came here with her, and who has the firmest faith in Kharapet. The household consists of a ladies' maid, another female servant, and a colored man, a cook, recommended by Kharapet."

"What does all this lead to?" asked Sir Harcourt, as Brooke paused suddenly, struck by the difficulty of

impressing his hearer with his own convictions.

"For more than two months," resumed Brooke, "Miss Verner's health has been failing. She goes away for a fortnight—all her bad symptoms vanish. She returns, and they reappear. This Eastern is perpetually at the house. A girl like Miss Verner—of a physique so fine, with every indication of splendid

health-ought not to break down in this way without an accident—an illness—a visible cause."

"These things are hard to account for without a very thorough knowledge of the patient's circum-

stances. What are you driving at, Brooke?"

"Should Stasie Verner die under age her property goes to Kharapet. Had she married him he would have had a lovely wife and a good fortune. He is not the man to lose both. He is slowly removing the obstacle to his greed—the woman who denied him."

"My dear sir!" cried the physician, opening his

eyes, "you are positively dramatic. Would you have

me believe it is a case of poisoning?"

"I believe it is."

"Come, come, Brooke! You must have lost your head; just think of the certain detection which would follow such an attempt! How could a system of secret poisoning go on where a number of people are living in the same house, eating the same food, drinking the same beverages? others would be affected. No one would be mad enough to venture on so daring a piece of villainy!"

"Nevertheless he is venturing it, I am fully convinced. When first my suspicions were roused, I made Stasie give me some of the sweetmeats that cook of

hers makes, and-"

"Ha! you analyzed them," exclaimed Sir Harcourt

eagerly.

"No; analysis is most difficult with the class of poisons I suspect Kharapet uses. No; I ate them myself."

"The deuce, you did! and what then? You are

alive to tell the tale."

"Yes; I was pretty sure the dose would not be strong enough to do me much harm; but it was not without effect. I felt something of the fever, the nausea, the palpitation that are playing the mischief with that sweet, unoffending girl, and which will end in her death if Kharapet's doings are not put a stop to."

"That's rather curious," said Sir Harcourt thoughtfully; "but you are evidently imaginative—you might have fancied these symptoms. The correct plan would have been to analyze."

"I will have a piece of the helwa analyzed by some good chemist, but I question if it will be of much

avail."

"My dear fellow, I am sorry you have allowed yourself to be overmastered by a fixed idea. Be the temptation what it may, you will never persuade me that a man like this Kharapet (I sat next him at dinner at Lady Kilconguhar's, and he seemed rather a superior man), a man well received in good society—in all respects a gentleman; that such a man would run the risk of attempting the crime you suppose-for what? to possess himself of a comparatively small fortune (the young lady is not a millionaire, is she?), and to revenge himself on a girl who had refused him! Why, few men care enough about yes or no in such a matter -an Oriental least of all! You must remember how nearly impossible it is to obliterate the traces of poison, and, I should say, quite impossible to administer it to one member of a family who has no need to take any especial medicine or keep to a particular diet without injuring the rest more or less. This would involve immediate suspicion."

"I see how the circumstances must appear to you, yet my impression is still the same," said Brooke, with some eagerness, though he strove hard to be cool. "I should have taken the same view had I not seen some curious cases of poisoning in India, did I not know there is a poison used by those scoundrels, the Thugs, since they abandoned the sacred noose, which our best analysts could not detect, so rapidly is it absorbed and eliminated when given in small and repeated

doses, as is, I believe, their plan."

"But this Kharapet is a Christian—a Syrian. He may be as ignorant of this poison as I am," exclaimed Sir Harcourt

"He has lived much in Rajpootana and other native states, where the deadly *Datura stramonium* grows on the roadsides and offers easy means to put away an enemy or slay a stranger to propitiate their sanguinary goddess."

"Still, I doubt if Kharapet would attempt such a crime, or, indeed, that he could carry it out. What is there in this man's character or antecedents which

leads you to suspect him?"

"I know nothing of his antecedents," returned Brooke, "nor do I know any thing against his character; but I confess I have disliked and distrusted

him from the first."

"Ah! just so! There, I suspect, lies the key to the riddle. You must not let prejudice or imagination run away with you. Cool sound judgment is the most essential quality in a medical man. Put these crotchets out of your head; if you take action under their influence they will lead you into a mess that will be any thing but advantageous to your future career. It is not like what I remember of you, to be led away by fancy. There is some under current of which I know nothing. If I were you, and so deeply interested in the young lady, I should just take her under my own care altogether, especially as she has the wherewithal; only, I should like a sounder condition of health in a wife. Send her to me in a fortnight; I feel sure I shall find her greatly improved."

"Certainly, she shall have the benefit of your advice; but my doubts and suspicions are not in the slightest degree changed by your natural and sensible observations. I must do the best I can unassisted."

This interview produced a terribly depressing effect on Brooke; it proved to him the enormous barrier which habit and custom raises against the admission of a new idea. Filmer was a learned and enlightened man, broad-minded in the best

sense of the word; yet a life passed among proprieties, and in a society from which the "shocking" was carefully excluded, made it impossible for him to believe that such a tragedy as Brooke had suggested was being enacted within a twenty-four mile radius of St. Martin's-le-Grand. Had it been a piece of legal or stock-broking chicanery, or the design of a spiteful servant, or the proposed crime of some vulgar ruffian, Sir Harcourt might have lent a ready ear and a helping hand; but that a smooth-spoken well-mannered man, admitted into some of the best houses in town-a man who, from his position and education, must be aware of the value of character-should risk all his advantages for the sake of melodramatic revenge and preposterous greed, was too much opposed to English common-sense, too much like the plot of a second-rate French novel, to be credited by a Briton cradled in conventionality for so many years, as the great doctor had been.

Brooke, as he walked away from the house, felt half angry with himself for not having foreseen this. Twenty years ago, when Filmer was a young struggling man, he would have taken in the idea more readily; "as it is, prosperity has so padded the walls of life's cell for him, he forgets that beneath the cushions are rugged stones, rude angles, rusted iron clamps.

Now I must act alone and unaided."

He made his way to his club, and finding one or two acquaintances there who were passing through town, tried to change the current of his thoughts by talk on various ordinary topics, thus seeking relief for an hour or two, that he might return with fresh vigor to the all-important question of his future line of conduct.

Meanwhile Stasie Verner's head and heart were much occupied by conjecture as to what could be the real meaning of her last conversations with Brooke. At first she never doubted that when he avowed, in an impulsive, irrepressible way, that he was miserable at

Sefton Park, yet could not leave it, and that it was the world to him, that he was on the point of confessing his affection for Mrs. Harding; yet what could be more improbable than that a grave, self-possessed man like Brooke, a man so much her superior in age as well as every thing else, should make a confidante of her? It was, no doubt, an involuntary expression of feeling of which he was scarce conscious; but if so, how unhappy he must be, and how Stasie longed to comfort him! But it would be better for him to go; there was no good in staying. As to Mrs. Harding, no one in the world could come between her and her children; and no doubt Dr. Brooke was well aware of this, or a man of his principles (as she supposed) would go fast enough. But all these conclusions were upset by his last words on this delicate topic. When he absolutely asked her leave to remain where he was, there could be no doubt of his being truly and deeply in earnest. She seemed still to see the intense questioning of his dark eyes. The relieved look that came into them when she exclaimed naturally that his remaining could not annoy her—what could he mean? Surely her opinion or permission could have little value in his eyes. Could he possibly be interested in herself? Her heart beat at the thought; but instinctively she turned from it. She was tacitly aware—tacitly even in her most candid self-communing-that the idea was too delightful, too flattering, to be looked at, lest it should haunt and master her.

After all, if Dr. Brooke was interested in her, it was probably as "a case." He certa nly thought her very unwell; he was anxious about her, in that she did not deceive herself, and he was clever, deep-seeing, quite beyond the average of doctors. This conviction made her not so much uneasy as depressed about herself; she never could describe the many curious and unpleasant sensations which from time to time disturbed her. The sudden beatings of the heart that came and went so mysteriously, the curious hallucinations that

flitted through her brain: for sometimes she could have sworn she saw Pearl, or a wild black cat that often visited the garden, come into the room, though she knew both door and window were shut; she had even risen from her seat to look for the creature she imagined. Such things as these she was ashamed to tell. She blamed herself for such fancies; yet the conviction grew on her that no one save Dr. Brooke knew how ill she really was. Still she could not conquer her reluctance to consult him; and a curious nervous dread of she did not know what, began to fasten upon her from the day Sir Harcourt Filmer made so light of her complaints.

In such a condition of mind Mr. Pearson's visits were a most agreeable means of escaping from herself, and Mrs. Harding's warning was partially forgotten. Moreover, Aunt Clem was so visibly vexed at his coming that Stasie felt bound to receive him with cor-

diality.

"What is the reason I don't get on with your aunt?" he asked confidentially, one wet afternoon two or three days after Brooke's interview with Sir Harcourt Filmer, as he was sitting beside Stasie's work-table. He had ridden over in spite of wind and weather, and had been very warmly welcomed by Stasie; soon after his arrival Aunt Clem had been summoned out of the room by the arrival of "Mr. Kharapet, who is very wet,'m, and must change his things before he comes into the drawing-room," the servant announced. Of course, Miss Stretton fussed away to see to that gentleman's comfort.

"Oh! you get on with her very well," said Stasie

carelessly.

"Not a bit of it. I wish you would give me the 'tip,' Miss Verner; I want to make friends with her. In general, elderly ladies are deuced fond of me; I assure you they are."

"I am afraid you think every one is fond of you,

Mr. Pearson."

"I wish every one was fond of me," cried the young man with emphasis; "but I am afraid it is just those I like best that care least for me."

"I imagine that is often the case," returned Stasie

dreamily as she played with Pearl's ears.

"By Jove, Miss Verner, you have such a way of

shutting a fellow up."

"I don't want to shut you up," said Stasie turning a pair of beautiful wondering eyes upon him.
"I want you to talk, for I am very dull—tell me

about Lady Pearson?"

"Oh, my mother is better; you know she has been quite worn out nursing Frank; but he is doing very well, and she gets more rest. She sent her love to you. She hopes, as soon as my brother is all right, you'll come and stay with her. Though it's not the season, there is a good deal of fun to be had in London towards the end of November. Any place would be better than this hole; why, even you, and I am sure you have no end of pluck, you can't stand it—you looked twice as bright at Southsea."

"You don't think me looking ill, do you?" cried Stasie, starting up and going to look at herself in the glass with undisguised interest; "why, you are

as bad as Dr. Brooke."

"Brooke! Oh, he couldn't take a cheerful view of any thing. He is going melancholy mad, I believe. Why, he was at my father's two or three times last season, and we all thought him an uncommonly pleasant fellow. I never saw a man so changed."

"What do you think is the reason?" asked Stasie,

with much interest, as she resumed her seat.

"Well, I do not fancy it is far to seek," said the young Lancer, with an expressive look, which his companion did not see, as she was busy taking up a dropped stitch in her knitting. "But as to your looking ill, I never meant any thing of the kind. Ill or well, I—I seldom see any one like you."

Stasie made no reply; she still looked earnestly at her knitting, but not a shade of consciousness passed over her grave face. Poor Van Pearson felt as if cold water had been poured over him, and would rather have taken a wigging from his colonel than resumed the subject.

There was an awkward pause; and then, to cover his defeat, Pearson resumed his original topic. "At any rate Kharapet is A. I with Miss Stretton. Does she always rub him down when he comes in from

exercise?"

"What a funny way of putting it!" said Stasie, laughingly. "She is very fond of him certainly, and he is dreadfully afraid of taking cold, so—"

"He seems afraid of a good many things," interrupted Pearson. "Do you remember the day Pearl snap-

ped at him?"

"I do indeed. He can't help being nervous, I sup-

pose."

"Nervous!" repeated Pearson, with infinite contempt; "why, he hasn't the courage of a canary. These dark fellows never have."

"I would not say that," replied Stasie. "How caimly Easterns can die. I have heard they do not

value life."

"The lives of others, I dare say," cried Pearson. "I

do not like them."

"Ah, that is prejudice. It is strange how prejudiced even good-natured people like Mrs. Harding and yourself are about, or rather against, Easterns." Mr. Pearson murmured something inarticulate in reply, and then proposed to give Pearl a lesson in begging, in which pastime a quarter of an hour passed merrily, and then, seeing no possible excuse for staying, he rose to take leave.

"It is very good-natured of you to come over to

this stupid place," said Stasie unguardedly.

"Good-natured," cried Pearson, coloring; "good to myself, you mean. Why, if I came as often as I

wished, I'd be here every day, only I am afraid you

would be tired of me."

"No, I should not," began Stasie; then, catching sight of such a glow of triumph and joy in his eyes, she hastened to do away with the false impression she had unwittingly created. "That is, if one has a friend—a pleasant friend—one does not easily tire of him or—her." This was brought out with such hesitating confusion that her listener might well be excused for finding encouragement in her broken sentence.

"But, Miss Verner, may I venture to hope I am welcome? Ah, you must know I should like to be with

you all day, and every day of my life!"

A sense of sudden guilty confusion wrapped Stasie as if in a burning cloud. She should never have allowed him to get this length. It was terrible to undeceive him—she liked him so much—he was frank and boyish. With a great effort she forced herself to speak. "But that cannot be, you know, Mr. Pearson; our roads in life will probably be widely apart."

"You intend them to be apart, you mean?"

"I do," said Stasie gravely and bending her head.
"What an unspeakable idiot I am to have spoken so soon!" cried Pearson; "pray, pray forget it; let us be friends as we were."

"Oh yes, always friends; but you will forgive meyou will not think me unkind?—never any thing more."

"Never any thing more! you are too unkind—too cruel, Miss Verner; and I cannot help loving you! Perhaps I may win you yet—I cannot give up hope!"

He seized and kissed her hand, and then rushed away, nearly overturning Kharapet, who had paused in the doorway, a spectator of poor Pearson's adieux.

Stasie was greatly moved, and really sorry to lose the bright young fellow's society, and, as was natural to a girl full of warm feeling, over-estimated considerably the force of the blow she had been obliged to administer. She threw herself on the sofa, and yielded to an hysterical fit of crying—a tendency which she had often to resist, even when there was little or no

moving cause.

Kharapet stood looking at her for an instant, his eyes kindling, a tremor stealing through his muscles. He could not imagine what affected Stasie so violently. He stole nearer, and again paused. What if she had quarreled with this insolent young man? Perhaps in her vexation she might turn to him. Still he hesitated to speak until, with a vague, uneasy sensation that something or some one was near her, she turned and met his eyes.

"Stasie!" he uttered, in a strange, suppressed, imploring way. "You are unhappy; you shed tears! What vexes you? Can I not help, can I not comfort you? What has that young man said or done? How

did he dare to kiss your hands?"

"You are really very tiresome, Hormuz," said Stasie impatiently. She was indignant and a little frightened

at his tone. "You have no right to ask."

Stasie; do you wish that young man recalled?"

"No, certainly not," returned Stasie, somewhat touched by Kharapet's words. "He is very nice and

good, but I do not want him back."

"I thought you loved him, Stasie. He is of your own race; you cannot despise him as you do the poor Syrian whose fathers worshiped the true God and His divine Son, when *yours* were heathens."

"I do not despise you, Hormuz! How have I ever shown it? I am grateful to you for all your kindness,

and----'

"Then, if you do not love him," interrupted Kharapet, drawing closer to her, "whom do you love? Is your heart, indeed, still empty? Ah, Stasie! is there then still a chance for me? You do not know how I have suffered and languished for you! You do not know," closing his eyes and stretching out his arms towards her for a moment, and then dropping them to his side, "you do not know from what misery your love would save me, from what you would save yourself, if—if only you would be mine."

"Well, but I cannot; you know I cannot," cried Stasie, infinitely annoyed by this return to the old conflict between them. "Can I not exist without being in love? I wish you would not worry yourself and me. We had grown quite comfortable and friendly; why will you begin it all over again? There is no accounting for one's fancies or feelings. You will find many charming girls willing enough to marry

you, and I shall always like you as---"

"But I want you—only you," broke in Kharapet, with a suppressed vehemence, a fierce glitter in his eyes that startled Stasie, her nerves being already a little strained. "I have ever thought of you as mine, and looked to you, and waited for you; and if you be not my wife, neither shall you be the wife of any other. You shall not mock me, I am resolved, without paying dear for your sport! Once more, Stasie, choose between my love and hate!"

"I should be very angry with you for talking such nonsense," cried Stasie, "only I see you are disturbed in some unusual way. I do not think you know what you are saying, and I am sorry for it. But if you ever speak in this way again I'll tell my guardian, and never let you inside the doors any more. Why, you must have lost your senses!" She was angry and

frightened both.

Kharapet was silent for a moment or two, the fire died out of his eyes, his face showed a deadly dusky pallor, his hands, which hung down, clenched themselves, while he muttered, in a thick, low tone, "On

vour head be it!"

There was a pause. Kharapet turned and went softly towards the door; then he stopped, and again, facing Stasie, said slowly, "Yes, I have forgotten myself. I have lost my self-control. I ought not to have offended you. You cannot perhaps even imagine the terrible temptation that came over me. Can you forgive? I promise never again to offend. I will go away—away for a long time. You will forgive me, Stasie?"

"I will, I will; only never speak like this again, and do, do go away. I do not like to make you unhappy, but I cannot listen to such wild words any more."

She slipped past him and flew to her own room, where she locked herself in, and indulged in a long,

irrepressible fit of sobbing and passionate tears.

Kharapet's looks and manner, as well as his speech, had aroused an extraordinary degree of fear and repulsion. How she hoped and prayed he would go away! A sense of being helpless and unprotected oppressed her. Mr. Harding was evidently of little avail; Mrs. Harding, Aunt Clem, powerless; her guardian in some inaccessible region; Mrs. Mathews weak and poor! It was some time before she could compose herself sufficiently to join her aunt, when she found to her relief that Kharapet had gone to dine with Mr. Robinson and Dr. Brooke.

At least he had the good taste not to force himself upon her. How she wished she might never see him again, for in her inmost heart a sudden revelation told

her he was a bitter and implacable enemy.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

Now that the evenings closed in early, Mr. Harding's ardor for his country quarters abated considerably. The walk up from the station of a dark drizzling night was exceedingly disagreeable, and the house, which in long fine days was quite large enough with its supplementary porch and garden, seemed too contracted to breathe in, when shut up at half-past five or six o'clock. This sense of inconvenience made him contradictory and irritable for a day or two before he could confess to having changed his plans.

"This room is either so stuffy that one is smothered, or so cold that one is perished," he said, after changing his seat once or twice, "I think I took cold walking up from the station this evening in the rain."

The dinner had just been cleared away, and the

husband and wife were still sitting at table.

"Perhaps you had better take some hot brandy and

water instead of wine," said Mrs. Harding.

"Perhaps I had, and, Jane, give me the paper; I had no time to look at it to-day. After all, a life like mine is perfect slavery, toil, toil, toil, for others to

spend. What good do I get of my earnings?"

"You have what most men work for, a comfortable home," returned his wife. "What more can any man, be he ever so rich, get out of his wealth but food, clothes, lodging, and some personal indulgences, besides the consideration of his fellows, which counts for a good deal."

"Ay! a man whose pockets are well lined is always respected," said Harding complacently, and added, after a pause during which Jane placed the materials requisite for the medicine his wife recommended on the table, "you have a good deal more sense than you

used to have, Livy."

"You flatter me," she returned gravely, "you see I have been your pupil now for quite eleven years."

"That's it,—you are right!" with a tone of superiority, "and you have been deucedly hard to teach."

"No doubt; but you have quite succeeded."

Mr. Harding gave an inarticulate grunt of uncertain import, and applied himself to his paper. Mrs. Harding continued to crochet a warm vest for Willie, and silence reigned for some minutes. Then Mr. Harding

threw down his paper with disgust.

"I never read such blank, blank nonsense," he exclaimed, "filling whole columns with this bosh about the Education Act. I don't know what we are coming to! I am pretty sure that if every plowboy and mechanic is to be taught reading and writing, and the Lord knows what, we'll have the whole edifice about our ears, and the devil to pay into the bargain."

It is scarcely necessary to say that Mr. Harding was highly conservative, keenly alive to the necessity of rising himself, and of keeping his inferiors down.

rising himself, and of keeping his inferiors down.

"Is there any Eastern news?" asked Mrs. Harding, who had long ago given up all idea of arguing with her husband.

"Not much; I see there are one or two failures in the tea trade. Things are not what they used to be in China, nor, for that matter, in India either. In my opinion, when matters are a little settled in Japan, that will be the place for an enterprising fellow. If Johnny grows up as I expect he will, I'll establish a house for him out there."

"It will be a good opening, I suppose."

"I believe you,"—another pause, broken suddenly by an exclamation from Mr. Harding. "I say! do you know that Kharapet has been down here for a couple of days?"

"Yes, I saw him at Limeville yesterday."

"And he never came near us! It is most extraordinary. I heard of him from Brooke whom I met coming from Stasie Verner's house. What do you think that Syrian thief is up to?"

"I am sure I haven't the least idea. I imagine he has quite given up all hopes of Stasie?"

"And I am pretty sure he has not."

"Why?"

"Because he is so d—d particular about the investment and management of Stasie's money! He worries my life out; no man would give himself so much trouble about what he did not consider his own, or pretty sure to be his own."

"It never will be his, I am convinced," said Mrs.

Harding quietly.

"So am I; but tell me, Livy, how does young Pearson stand with her?"

"It is hard to say. I am inclined to think he has

not much chance."

"So much the better. It will suit her and me all the more if she does not marry for a couple of years. By the way, I want to ask Robinson and your cousin, and Stasie and that aunt of hers up to dinner on the 15th,—it's my birthday,—and then we'll go away up to town. This is a miserable place now winter is creeping on us."

"Very well," said Mrs. Harding, "I will begin to

prepare."

"And write a line to Dr. Baring; we'll have Johnnie

home for a few days to drink my health."

"I do not think that would be wise," said the mother gently, "he has hardly had time to settle since he went to school, and you know from what the doctor says he has been a little difficult to manage."

"The doctor is a blank psalm-singing old beggar! he is trying to break the boy's spirit, and I want him!

So just sit down and write as I tell you."

"I cannot be accessory to what I disapprove," returned Mrs. Harding firmly; "and if you reflect, I

think you will see I am right!"

"I shall see nothing of the kind. It is for me to judge. Just you sit down without more talk, and write to the doctor."

"No," said Mrs. Harding, "I will not. I have as good a right to decide what is best for my boy as you

have, especially at his present age."

Mr. Harding paused a moment thunderstruck, and then, throwing the end of his cigar into the fire, started from his seat and began marching up and down the room in a fury. "I wonder if he will beat me," thought Mrs. Harding, while she kept a cool exterior.

"Do you know what you are about, contradicting me in this way!" he stuttered in a transport of rage. "By—I believe you have lost your senses! Who pays for the boy? who has a right to decide any thing respecting him but me? By—I'll have him home, if it were only to show you your place."

it were only to show you your place."

"It is my place to insist on what is for his good, and I will." Her voice, low and clear, struck Harding with curious effect, as a new force with which he had

yet to reckon.

"Have you thought of the consequences—the serious consequences of your —— opposition to my will, your

— obstinacy."

"No, but let us consider them. What can be the result of my maintaining my own opinion as to what is good for my own child? You cannot put me out of doors for differing from you. You cannot prove me failing in duty or in any way free yourself from the cost of supporting me, to say nothing of losing the cheapest upper servant you could possibly find; and what about the opinion of your world? which is worth something. Pooh! my dear, do not waste your energy getting into a senseless rage; try to understand your real position. I have been hard to teach, as you say, but I have learned my lesson at last. Do sit down—it worries me to see you raging to and fro like a caged bear."

Mr. Harding was so astonished that he did sit down. His wife, nearly as much surprised at her own courage, which grew as she spoke, and as she observed the impression she made upon her husband, went on quietly

with her work though her heart beat, and her fingers

trembled.

"This—this is very extraordinary," exclaimed Mr. Harding at length. "I don't understand you, Livy! what are you driving at; what the deuce do you want?"

"Nothing that is not my due, and that, believe me,

I will have."

"Who wants to defraud you! I am sure I am a good husband, and you have never wanted for any thing; and now, this poor boy! You do not care to see him. I believe you do not love him because he is like me."

Mrs. Harding laughed a low peculiar laugh, as she thought how gladly she would obliterate all trace of the father from her boy; but she said, "I should be well pleased to see him resemble you in some respects, not all, and as to loving him, poor fellow! ask him what he thinks!"

"You don't want him to resemble me in all respects, hey! that is a pretty speech for a wife to make! Pray, in what respect would you wish him different from

me?"

"In temper and love of self."

"By Jove! I am a brute, am I?— a selfish brute?" Mrs. Harding was silent. "Come, answer me; am I a selfish brute?"

"Yes, very often," returned Mrs. Harding emphatic-

ally.

"The devil I am! do you think I care for your opinion?"

"I do not know; but if you convey the same im-

pression to others, it may be inconvenient."

"Well, I must say this is an extraordinary speech from a woman I took without a rag to her back or sixpence in her pocket!"

"My poverty has nothing to do with my opinions. I do not dispute the imprudence of your choice; but here I am, and you will find it more to your comfort

to treat your wife with decent consideration than to

try to wipe your feet upon her."

"Oh! if you are going into the heroics, I have done! but," rising with an attempt at his usual swagger, "I will have that boy home for the 15th; I'll be d—d if I haven't. I can write to the doctor myself, I suppose?"

"You can do what you choose, but I will take no

part in what I object to so strongly."

Mr. Harding hesitated, and then, muttering something about a "devilish obstinate little virago," left the room, slamming the door, beyond which Mrs. Harding heard him shouting to Jane to bring another glass of hot

brandy and water to his room.

She put down her work, and, leaning her elbows on the table, buried her face in her hand, a slight shiver passing through her delicate frame. "It is a desperate miserable battle," she thought, "but I must fight it out, and even victory will not release me from degradation, but he shall never trample me under his feet again."

Kharapet's outbreak made a deep impression on Stasie: not even his departure the following evening relieved her of the strange nervous dread he had evoked. She began to fear she knew not what: to be alone, to be spoken to suddenly, to go out, to stay in, a curious feverish restlessness consumed her strength and painful dreams alternated with intervals of wakefulness through the night. Yet she bore up bravely. She was strong and reasonable, and Brooke, in his daily visits, noticed with deep sympathy and warm admiration the resistance she made against irritability and depression, the sweetness with which she sought to atone for any little outbreak of impatience, the force she exerted to subdue or bear her nervous disturbance. As to himself, a new power of insight of assimilation seemed to be granted him during this terrible and trying time. He managed to propitiate Aunt Clem; he

made himself more acceptable to Mr. Harding than before. He grew all and all to Stasie. From the moment he entered the room, where she sat trying to work, or play some favorite morsel of music, she was aware of a sense of relief. He always suggested some topic that interested her, and drew her out of herself: and when he bade her good-by she could hardly restrain herself from crying, "Stay, do not leave me!" an impulse quite distinct from the shy tenderness which she could not eradicate, and which sprang from the sense of comfort and safety conveyed by his presence.

"What has become of young Pearson?" asked Brooke one afternoon, as he sat talking with the aunt and niece, having vainly attempted to persuade them to come out. "I have not seen him for a long time."

"No; he has quite deserted us," returned Aunt Clem briskly. "I cannot say I deeply regret it. He is very shallow, and not too well bred."

"Well, I liked him very much," cried Stasie. "He is very young, I mean young in nature, but he is bright

and pleasant.

"Probably he is away on leave," said Brooke.
"No," replied Miss Stretton. "I saw him at Water-loo Station, and he all but cut me; nothing could be

more stiff and awkward than his manner."

Brooke looked towards Stasie and caught her eyes; she colored quickly, vividly, and with a thrill of delight he took in the situation. Young Pearson had been rejected, and Stasie had honorably kept the secret. Here was a possible obstacle swept from his path; dare he now risk his own fate and hers? He scarcely knew, he felt dizzy for a half second. Stasie's extreme reticence, born of her fear of displaying feelings which were not to be reciprocated, held him back, and she too was misled by her strong conviction-first, that Brooke was attached to his cousin; secondly, that his interest in herself was professional.

Meanwhile Miss Stretton was talking on steadily. "I cannot say I think Stasie much improved," she was saying when Brooke next listened to her. "She is decidedly thinner and more languid. I am rather anxious for next Wednesday; we are going to see Sir Harcourt, and if he suggests nothing new, I should certainly recommend homœopathy."

"Yes, it would do as well as any thing else," replied Brooke, out of his thoughts, and not heeding his words.

"Do you then despair of me?" cried Stasie quickly, her large eyes very wide open, and dewy with some thing like tears.

"Despair? no," drawing near her and leaning on the back of her chair. "I wish I could persuade you to consult *me*. I have the secret of the true remedy,

but you do not believe in me!"

"Believe or not, I will ask your help if I am not

better soon."

"The fact is, Stasie so often forgot her medicine at first, and, I am ashamed to say, so did I (you see I have so much to attend to, so many cares on my mind, Dr. Brooke), that Mr. Kharapet, with his usual sound judgment, advised me to entrust—"

Here she was interrupted by the entrance of Bhoodhoo, who held a small salver on which stood a wine glass containing about a spoonful of greenish white

fluid, and a caraffe of water.

"Ah, just so! here he is, as punctual as the sun," concluded Miss Stretton, smiling on him. The Hindoo approached Stasie with a slight bow; filling up the glass with water he presented it to her, and stood calmly watching while she drank it off and returned the glass. He then set down the tray on a table by the door, made up the fire, put the chairs in order—all softly, noiselessly—took up his tray again and departed.

Brooke stood straight up, with a sudden fresh fear

thrilling through his veins.

"Did Kharapet advise you to confide the administration of Miss Verner's medicine to that—man?" he asked.

"Yes; why should he not?" said Stasie, struck by his tone.

"I don't know, only it seems to me more natural

that your own maid should do this service."

"Oh! no one is to be depended on like Bhoodhoo," cried Miss Stretton. "He is so thoughtful, so attentive!"

Brooke was struck dumb at the sight of such a means of destruction placed in the hands of Stasie's enemies. Had he been alone with her he would then and there have risked all, and asked her to be his wife. He felt he could not endure this state of things much longer, and that for the moment he must get away and speak to some one, even in a half confidence.

He walked to the window and back. Stasie felt he was deeply disturbed; she could not understand why. Why should he be put out because Bhoodhoo

brought her her medicine?

"I must leave you; I have not seen Mrs. Harding since the day before yesterday. Miss Verner, if I may come to-morrow I will read you some bits from my rough notes of an expedition I made into Cashmere; they may amuse you."

"Oh yes, do come," cried Stasie, more warmly than

she was aware.

Brooke left the house and walked rapidly towards Mrs. Harding's abode in a maddening state of alarm and indecision. The net was closing round Stasie, the danger growing more imminent. He could not banish from his eyes the picture of her fair, frank face, her kindly smile of thanks, as she put out her hand to take perhaps her death from the dark traitor she had loaded with kindness. How willingly and easily Brooke would have crushed his life out, if he did not know that any overt act of his would have cut off Stasie's only chance of escape.

He must not delay any longer. He must avow his love for her, and strive to gain her consent to an immediate marriage. Even this, if successful, was full of danger and difficulty. If Kharapet knew of such a project being on foot, he could soon snap the deli-cate cords that bound his victim to life! Then even punishment would be scarce possible, and if it were, what consolation could that afford? what could earth give to supply the loss of a creature that had grown so inexpressibly dear to him, who had revealed to him possibilities of joy and sorrow of which he had never

previously dreamed.

His burning anxiety for her safety and welfare had given something of a father's tenderness and consideration to his love for her, yet there were moments when danger seemed less pressing, or Stasie herself seemed more than usually confiding, when a sudden sense of her beauty and unconscious grace thrilled him with passionate intoxicating delight, and made him fearful of his own eagerness; for affection such as his is always self-distrustful. And she was so young, so inexperienced; how could he tell that extended knowledge of society might not show her many whom she would prefer to himself.

That she began to trust and lean upon him he perceived, and had he time, he might possibly win her love. She was proud and delicate; suppose a sudden declaration were to frighten away the first soft gathering mists of tenderness, hereafter to descend upon him in a golden shower of bounteous love! If he failed, he must warn her, remove her at any risk. "The way to safety, the only secure way, is to me such a heaven of hope that my calmer sense reels. I must think for

her alone."

By this time he had passed Sefton House considerably, walking with long swift strides, too feverish and disturbed to heed where he was going, when he found himself suddenly confronted by the very person he sought.

"Why, Jim, are you walking for a wager?"
"No, I was lost in thought, and I was coming to see you."

"Then you have considerably overshot the mark," said Mrs. Harding, smiling; "we are quite half a mile

from home."

"I am afraid I took no heed of time or space either," replied Brooke, turning with her; "must you go straight back, or can you come round by the copse and the rector's fields? I want a very private consultation with you."

"And I with you. No, I need not return just yet. I have been down to Frome's house (the man who manages our small farming operations) with a message from Mr. Harding, and he was out; let us go round by the path and try to find him again. Now, begin your tale, Jim."

"I prefer hearing yours first."

"Well, there are one or two matters I wish to speak to you about. First, what is most important and interesting to you! I am growing very uneasy about Stasie Verner."

"Ha!" cried Brooke, with deeply stirred attention. "She is getting into such a nervous state—so unlike herself-that I do not know what to make of her. She is conscious that her fears and fancies are unreal, and yet she cannot master them."

"How?" ejaculated Brooke.

"I will tell you, though it is a breach of confidence. Yesterday she paid me a long visit, and we were alone, which seldom happens. Gradually she came to talk of Hormuz Kharapet, and I was quite distressed at the curious unreasoning terror of him she, at first, half-unconsciously displayed; then she opened her heart, and I gathered that he had made a violent scene some days ago-a scene that has produced an extraordinary impression on her, quite inadequate to the cause. She seems to dread and detest him. I really think she ought to go away somewhere for a while; but if she goes with Miss Stretton, of course that entails constant visits from Kharapet."

"Go on!" exclaimed Brooke. Mrs.

glanced at him and continued: "I think Stasie will have a bitter enemy in Kharapet when he realizes that she will never marry him. Mr. Harding said the other evening that he must look on Stasie's money as his own: he is so careful about investing and managing it."
"Is he? the infernal villain," ejaculated Brooke,

"I do not know that you can help us in any way, Jim—especially as Stasie is averse to consult you professionally, though she is certainly uneasy about herself; but it is a comfort to talk to you."

"No; I know but too well how little use I can be."

said Brooke, "unless—indeed"—he paused.

"My dear Jim, are you not too distrustful of your-

self?"

"Do you venture to encourage me, Livy? Your opinion has great weight with me. Do you think I have any chance?"

"In truth I cannot tell; but were you accepted, you

would be a tower of strength-"

"And were I rejected, all would be lost."

"Yes, for you; but I am so anxious that Stasie should like—love you—that perhaps my wishes stimulate my hopes. After my own children, you and Stasie

are the only creatures I care for in the world."

"Thank you, my dear cousin; believe me, it is more than the mere dread of rejection on my own account that holds me back; one day "—but interrupting himself—" I will risk it, Livy, on the first opportunity dread of one suitor may drive poor Miss Verner into the arms of another. Should she accept me, our marriage must be immediate."

"I do not see that!" exclaimed Mrs. Harding; "your position as an accepted suitor would entitle you to ex-

ercise influence, and even authority."

"And how soon would Kharapet and Wyatt and your husband admit my claim to either?" asked Brooke grimly.

Mrs. Harding's eyes met his, and she seemed to take in some unspoken communication, at which her color rose faintly, and, after a pause, she said low, but very

distinctly:

"Should you ever consider any extra prompt measure necessary—which I do not think will be the case—do not tell me. However heartily I may sympathize with you both, it would not do for me to connive at any—let us say unconventional—proceedings in my own relative. I must ménager my husband, you know, Jim; and indeed—indeed—once accepted, there would be no need for unbecoming haste."

"No need for haste!" repeated Brooke absently. "We shall see; at any rate, Livy, I shall always count on your friendship—your good-will, may I not?"

"You may indeed," softly. There was a long pause, during which Mrs. Harding stole a glance at her companion's face. She was struck by the look of resolution, somber and set, which had come into it. His deep, dark eyes were wide opened, with a far-off look, as if he were reviewing his scattered but available forces. At length his companion broke the silence: "You think me a dreadful coward, no doubt, Jim."

"Who—me?" cried Brooke, coming back from his mental excursions. "No! I wonder your brain and nerves are not in a state of liquefaction, considering the burning fiery furnace through which you have

passed."

"I have not had a very happy life, but it is going to be better—I am going to make it better," in a quietly firm tone.

"I am delighted to hear it; and I believe there is

much in your own power."

"Yes, and the power is coming, as I have lived through fear and hope, and that terrible longing for sympathy that does not exist. I have won another battle since I last had a quiet talk with you, Jim," and she described the struggle she had had with her husband respecting a supernumerary holiday for Johnnie.

Brooke listened with sincere interest. "I am glad you won, Livy," he said; "but were you right to contradict him about the boy? His best point is his affection—such as it is—for the children. It was better

Johnnie should stay at school, but——"

"It was," interrupted Mrs. Harding, "and still more necessary for me to insist upon his remaining there. My dear Jim, in a contest such as I have entered upon, I must never yield. I will be very careful, if I can, not to take the wrong side in any dispute; but once I have adopted a side, I must maintain it at all costs."

"I am very glad you have taken my advice, Livy."
"Yes, your words strengthened me, but the idea was dawning on me; and the irresistible appeal of the children, to whom I felt my emancipation was all-important, gave me courage. The first steps of an insurrection are always the most difficult, I suppose. The first time I disputed Mr. Harding's dictum was a supreme effort, but the second was infinitely easier. I shall conquer, Jim, in the end; for, having nothing to lose, I can dare all things. My supremacy will be a boon to my husband as well as to my children, if I win it. I look back at my past cowardice with shame and con-

"No doubt," replied Brooke; "you have inserted the thin edge of the wedge; all you have to do now is

trition—but better late than never."

to strike home."

"I ought to tell you," concluded Mrs Harding, with a smile, "that the night before last Mr. Harding informed me, with an air of authority, he had made up his mind not to have Johnnie home for the 15th, and that I was not to write to Dr. Baring. I answered meekly, "Very well," and so the matter ended. I wonder what our next battle will be about?"

"No matter; nail your colors to the mast; I see you are right. In such a contest you must neither

give nor take quarter."

"And God defend the right!" concluded Mrs. Harding, with a smile, half sad and slightly mocking.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

Mr. Harding's change of plans threw a gloom over the little circle at Sefton Park. Mrs. Harding was tacitly looked upon as its head and center; but the prospects of her departure woke in each member a sudden sense of her value and importance.

To Stasie the prospect of her removal from the immediate neighborhood was peculiarly depressing. Though attached to her aunt, she could never find the companionship and sufficiency she needed in her society, while Mrs. Harding amply supplied both.

The knowledge that within a few hundred yards was household warmth, ready kindly greeting, the cheery rippling of children's voices and laughter, a friendly sympathetic listener whose simple straight-forward common-sense was always at the service of those that sought counsel or advice, was wonderfully comforting and strengthening; and to think of that homely familiar abode closed, its pleasant windows shuttered, its comfortable chimney smokeless, its hearth-stones cold, was intolerably oppressive.

Miss Stretton, observing the effect this approaching separation produced upon her niece, and beginning to think Sefton Park might probably be a dreary residence in winter, suddenly suggested that they might as well terminate their tenancy of Limeville in the ensuing month of November, and move to town into a furnished house, "for," concluded the thoughtful spinster, "after being accustomed to your own nice servants, my love, you would not like to put up with what you would find in a lodging. I will just write and ask Mr. Kharapet to come down and talk it over; it is curious that neither he nor Mr. Pearson have been near us for a week past."

Stasie said she would like to go to town very much, and then reminded her aunt that more than a fortnight had elapsed since her first visit to Sir Harcourt Filmer,

and that it would be well to pay him another, as she did not think herself much the better for his remedies.

To this proposition Aunt Clem eagerly agreed, and

the following day was fixed upon.

To Brooke this move brought little or no hope. His interview with Filmer proved how little there was to expect either from his knowledge or his imagination; yet he resolved to see him once more, and ascertain from his own lips his opinion of the young patient.

In the interim he had seen Stasie nearly every day, and though he had watched her narrowly, he perceived nothing to increase his alarm. She was paler, stiller, more apt to start and tremble on slight occasions. Her eyes, too, had the strained and slightly staring

look that always distressed him.

For the last few days she had by his advice left off taking Sir Harcourt's prescription. This was a little relief; but Brooke too was cast down by the prospect of Mrs. Harding's departure. He felt so sure of a faithful intelligent ally, so far as he could trust her, that her loss appeared irreparable. How could he get on when she was too far for daily, hourly communication? However, a conviction—a calming and strengthening conviction—was growing upon him that this state of things could not last long, that he must soon find an opportunity to put an end to it.

However, he availed himself once more of his friendly relations with Filmer to call on the day following Stasie's visit, when he held a brief conversation

with his old master.

"I cannot say I find her improved," admitted Sir Harcourt. "I begin to suspect that the case is a little more complicated than I imagined. The heart certainly seems weak, and there is considerable depression; but I still think the same prescription, a little varied, and persevered in, may give relief. I have told her to go on with it for another fortnight, and then to return to me."

"If she still survives," put in Brooke quietly.

"My good fellow, are you still harping on that poisoning theory of yours? Believe me, it is a hallucination. I have thought it over as I would not have done had it been propounded by any other man than yourself, and I feel quite sure it will not hold water. Let your young friend follow my directions, and have a little change of air; you'll see she will come round."

"I will take care she does," said Brooke, with grim

resolution.

"Pray do, if you can suggest a better course of treatment."

When Brooke left his former master he felt none of the agitated despair that racked him after their first interview. He was calm, with the strength of a clear and fixed decision. He would, on the first opportunity, ask Stasie to be his wife; if she refused, then he would tell her, and her only, of his fears for her life. Even if she objected to him as a husband, he thought there was sufficient sympathy and understanding between them to make her trust him as a friend, as a man who would not speak unadvisedly or yield belief too readily. She too was brave and strong; and if she would but confide in him he might save her-save her to be happy with some luckier fellow than himself, Brooke indulged in no mental heroics over this magnanimous idea. His ardent desire to save a young precious life, possessed of all possibilities for good and happiness, swallowed up every thought of self; only, if she would accept the safety which the position of his wife would give her! Why, the idea made him dizzy with delight-so dizzy that he determined to keep it out of his head as much as possible. But should Stasie reject both his suit and his suspicions, how would it be? It was a tremendous risk.

Even if she accepted him, how should he persuade her to take so daring, so desperate a step as to elope! One of her greatest charms was a peculiar, proud, frank modesty that would certainly hold her back from such a step, unless, indeed, frightened into it; and he espec-

ially wished to avoid startling her by any revelation of the danger which surrounded her in her own quiet home. However terrible the alternative, he must risk an avowal, and be guided by what it brought forth.

The dread with which Kharapet seemed to have inspired Stasie, according to Mrs. Harding's account, might help him, and he would for the present hope the

best

The second visit to Sir Harcourt Filmer did not appear to have produced so depressing an effect as the first, though Stasie was very pale and quiet that evening, when Brooke went in to pay them a visit, as Mr. Robinson had gone out to dine with the father of the young lady whose attractions had raised such a struggle in his priestly mind.

But she told him with some animation that Kharapet was coming down to arrange with Miss Stretton for a

move to town.

"I am quite glad about it," added Stasie, who was sitting in a low basket-chair near the fire, playing idly with Pearl's ear. (She had grown strangely indolent of late.) "Now that the Hardings are going, I feel as if I could not stay here. It seems dreadfully whimsical, for I was quite fond of this place at first, but now I feel anxious to leave it. It would kill me to stay."

"You will be much better away," remarked Brooke, who was standing on the hearth-rug, and gazing at her downcast eyes, and the long lashes which rested on her cheek; "and remember, Miss Verner, I claim your

promise to accept my advice if Filmer fails."

"I confess I have not much faith in him," said Stasie, raising her eyes to his, and coloring quickly, as she met them in a way quite unusual to her, which showed Brooke that his said more than he imagined. "At present I feel tolerably well; but if I am ill again I will ask your advice, Dr. Brooke, for you only seem to see that I am or have been really ill. As for Sir Harcourt Filmer—"

"My dearest Stasie!" cried Aunt Clem, interrupt-

ing her with some emotion, "do not say that! I am sure Dr. Brooke himself has seen the deep, deep anxiety that I have felt on your account. I am now convinced that this dreadful, damp, desolate place is killing you! So I have begged Mr. Kharapet to come down and consult with me. It is so difficult to catch Mr. Harding, or get him to attend to any thing; and now that he is full of his own move, he is worse than ever. But I am sure Mr. Kharapet will arrange every thing for the best. I have the greatest confidence in him."

A slight smile passed over Stasie's lips; and after a moment's silence she exclaimed, "Don't you think, auntie, you are so much better now, we might go to

France or Italy?"

"I am sure, my dear Stasie, nothing would give me greater pleasure; but I must see Dr. Grimond, and ascertain if I dare undertake a journey. It would never do for you to be troubled dragging an invalid all

over the continent of Europe."

"You must be all right yourself, Miss Verner, before you attempt the grand tour," said Brooke, who could not shake off the impression which Stasie's quick conscious blush had made upon him. He longed for an enchanter's wand to transport Miss Stretton away any where, that he might be alone with Stasie, to clasp her hands and read the truth of her heart through her sweet honest eyes, to plead with her, to warn her! He stood there absorbed, deaf to a continuous stream of babble which Miss Stretton poured forth, seeking in vain for another glance from eyes that generally said so much. But in vain. Stasie soon after rose and changed her seat, and Brooke, finding the restraint on the expression of his feelings intolerable, bade them good-night.

"I really do think he is very clever," said Aunt Clem, looking after him as the door closed; "and, joking apart, he might suggest something that would do you good. He is most polite and considerate to

me too. I wonder how he and Mrs. Harding are getting on? or if Mr. H is a little jealous! He does not go nearly so often to Sefton House as he used, but that may be a blind!"

"I wish you would not talk in that way, Aunt Clem! it is too vulgar. Dr. Brooke may be fond of Mrs. Harding, but——"

"Vulgar!" interrupted Miss Stretton, somewhat indignantly. "Well, Stasie, that is the last accusation I should ever have expected from you, nor am I aware that I used any unladylike expression. Indeed, my dear child, I do not admit that you are a competent judge; for though you have an excellent disposition and all that, you are decidedly deficient in that sense of propriety, that elegant self-possession, which I have endeavored to inculcate on you." Miss Stretton paused with dignity.

"I know I am not genteel!" cried Stasie, "and I beg your pardon if I spoke rudely. I did not mean you were vulgar in words or manner, that you never are,

only—" she stopped.

"Only in thought! I am much obliged to you!" cried Miss Stretton. "However, vulgar or not, they understand each other. It is only three or four days ago since I watched them out of the staircase-window coming down the avenue, so utterly absorbed in each other that Thorn's boy-the butcher at Welwood-had to drive quite to one side, on the grass, to avoid running over them, they never seemed to hear or see the horse or cart."

Stasie made no reply, and Miss Stretton, mollified by the sound of her own voice, continued. going abroad, I really should like it well enough, and it's a curious thing, Stasie, that when trying the cards for you, dear (you see I think of you, though I am a vulgar person), it was as plain as the nose on your face that you are to go across the sea to escape a dark man! but who it is I cannot think. Mr. Pearson is fair, and so is Mr. Robinson, and it could not be Dr. Brooke; he does not seem to care enough about any one except Mrs. Harding to do mischief, though he is very gentlemanlike and well bred."

"Might it not be Mr. Kharapet," suggested Stasie,

with a faint mischievous smile.

"Mr. Kharapet! our best friend!" cried Aunt Clem. "Ah! Stasie, I am afraid those Pearson people have turned your head, for I observe your manner has been quite different to that kind good man since you came back from Southsea; and he is worth a dozen, nay dozens of that conceited young Pearson."

The following day was a protracted penance to Brooke. He found Kharapet installed at Limeville, and the whole house redolent of currie. Aunt Clem, in her best cap and sweetest smiles, was far too much occupied with the favored guest to bestow much attention on Brooke, and Stasie was not visible; so he wandered about the park and comforted himself by a long talk with Mrs. Harding.

Mr. Robinson, who had presented a very cheerful aspect since his dinner at Mr. Morison's, was disposed to be communicative as the friends sat together in the

evening.

"I am sorry they did not ask you, Brooke," said the young clergyman. "They are really a very nice family, Mrs. Morison is so kind and motherly, and the young ladies are very accomplished. They are rich too. The father has not had the same educational advantages as his children, but he is a liberal-minded man. He takes a great interest in the church. I mean this church here, and is planning some means with my Uncle Williams (he is my uncle by marriage) to raise funds for a stone edifice. I am to meet them at Mr. Williams's office to-morrow to talk the matter over. Three more houses have been let lately—one of these large houses and two villas—so the congfegation will

be considerably increased." The Rev. St. John paused, evidently not for want of words or subject.

"And the young lady you talked to me about that day at Richmond is one of his daughters?" asked Brooke, taking his cigar from his mouth and laying down his book, as he saw his host was disposed to be confidential. "What is this Morison?"

"Oh! he has a huge ready-made clothing ware-

house in the borough."

"What! like Moses?"

"No, no; ladies' clothes, bonnets, flowers, all sorts of things. He is evidently inclined to be very liberal about the church; and, do you know, Brooke, I have thought very seriously and conscientiously respecting the question of marriage for a priest. After all, I begin to think that family life is the holiest of all! especially when one can find a helpmeet so devout, so eager to assist in all good works, so sweetly cheerful, so kind-hearted as Marion Morison."

"If she is all that, you ought not to let her slip through your fingers," said Brooke, smiling, as he looked at the beaming face of his former school-

fellow.

"I really think it would be weak and unwise. I have hitherto been deterred by a consciousness of my own narrow circumstances and insignificance—at least personal insignificance—of course the dignity of my calling is apart—nothing can touch *that*. But, do you know, Brooke,—I may be mistaken,—it struck me last night, that somehow Mr. Morison would not object to me as a son-in-law, and that his interest in the church somehow is growing a personal matter."

"Very likely. The biggest haberdasher in London might be glad to get a clergyman of the Church of England, and a right good fellow to boot, for a son-

in-law. Go in and win, my dear boy!"

"I must not be too sure, you know, Brooke. I shall know more to-morrow. Indeed, I feel a little nervous about the meeting."

"Faint heart never won fair lady! I can't go with you to this council of three, Robby, but I will go into town with you. I hate meeting that fellow Kharapet, and I suppose he will be here all to-morrow."

"I think you are unreasonably prejudiced, Brooke."

"Reasonably or unreasonably. I'd like to wring his neck," said Brooke with vindictive energy, that startled and shocked his friend, who, after a pause, resumed their conversation, which soon branched off

to topics unconnected with this story.

Brooke found occupation enough in visiting his club, reading and answering some letters which he found there, and executing one or two commissions contained in one of them, to employ him until evening had closed in; and he met Robinson at the station in time to return with him to Sefton Park by the last train but one.

Robinson was still radiant. He explained at great length, and not too clearly, a complicated scheme by which Mr. Williams proposed to raise money sufficient to build the church, and he (Robinson) was charged

with the inspection and selection of plans, etc.

Brooke was not profoundly attentive. His thoughts were occupied with the question, Was he right to absent himself for so many hours at a stretch? He was filled with a fear that some untoward circumstance might arise in which, were he on the spot, he might be of use to Stasie or Mrs. Harding. He was curiously uneasy. He was filled with burning anxiety to know if Kharapet had left or would prolong his visit.

"Did you see any thing of Kharapet to-day?" asked Brooke, taking advantage of a pause in Robinson's

ready flowing talk.

"No; I fancy he is staying down here. Mrs. Harris tells me Miss Stretton's native servant came over to ask for a few bay leaves to flavor something, and that looks like more than the two ladies themselves to dinner."

"Ha! very likely. What o'clock is it, Robby?"

"Half-past eight."

"Not too late to have a word with Harding before I turn in;" so saying Brooke rose, took his hat and went forth. It was a still dark night full of the autumnal scent of some pine-trees, of which a clump stood a little higher up the road, of the faint odor of freshly-turned earth from a newly plowed field. No lamps as yet illuminated the chief approach to Sefton House, but Brooke knew the way well, and crossed to the opposite side of the way, as the path there was more worn and smoother. As he approached Limeville he observed lights in two of the upper rooms.

"I wonder if Kharapet has bored Stasie to death. and she has beat an early retreat," thought Brooke, as his imagination pictured the soft subtle Syrian, whose conversational powers, beyond certain subjects, were limited, indulging himself in furtive glances either of admiration or hate—or both in one—or playing draughts with Miss Stretton, a game in which he rather excelled. These thoughts brought him within a few steps of the gate, when it of ened, and a murmur of voices caught his ear; two men were speaking, not English. He paused and involuntarily drew close to the paling, for in spite of the dusky night he recog-

nized Kharapet and Bhoodhoo.

They spoke low but earnestly, Bhoodhoo gesticulating with what seemed to Brooke's experience an apologetic air. They were speaking Hindoostanee, but Brooke could only catch an indistinct murmur. There was a sound of rebuke in Kharapet's accent. After a few paces Bhoodhoo paused, and Kharapet went on a step, then half turning, said in a louder tone and emphatically, almost like a threat, "Khabardar." Bhoodhoo bowed low, stepped back, stopped an instant, and then re-entered the grounds of Limeville, evidently without perceiving the presence of a third person.

Brooke paused till he heard the gate shut and

locked, he then walked on quickly till within a safe distance of Kharapet, whom he watched until he had seen him enter the garden of Sefton House. He gave up his own intention of paying Mr. and Mrs. Harding a visit, and, retracing his steps, strolled as far as the railway station in deep thought.

"Khabar-dār." He knew the word; it conveyed a warning, "be careful," in the sense of "not too fast." The tone in which it was uttered gave deeper signifi-

cance to the syllables.

It might mean any thing. That Bhoodhoo should be careful in his service, conscientious in conduct, or careful in carrying out Kharapet's plans. Was he

going too fast with his devilish designs?

The word haunted Brooke. The terrible anxiety, which his own decision as to his future conduct had allayed for a moment, especially as he considered Kharapet's presence as a kind of guarantee against any immediate catastrophe, woke up with redoubled force. He burned to go straight to Limeville and comfort himself with one look at Stasie before he slept, but that was impossible: it was now considerably past nine.

He walked to and fro for a while, and then returned to the house. Robinson was deep in the composition of his weekly discourse, and after a vain attempt to read. Brooke retired to rest, or rather to unrest.

His first waking thought was of the ill-omened word he had overheard the night before; but thank God it was daylight, and the day was before him. He had not been to Limeville for forty-eight hours, and now he was entitled to pay a visit. He would go as early as politeness permitted. His spirits rose as he dressed and breakfasted, and his sense of relief was completed by seeing Kharapet walking down the road with unusual speed, probably to catch the nine o'clock train, as he was followed by Bhoodhoo, who carried a large traveling-bag.

Brooke wrote a couple of letters, he smoked a cigar,

he discussed an article in the *Times* with his friend, he strove to delay and occupy himself in various ways, and yet it was only eleven o'clock when he rang the front door bell at Limeville. The door—now ordinarily closed against the chill autumnal air—was opened by Mary, the neat bright-looking housemaid, whose aspect struck Brooke as unusually grave and serious. "Are the ladies visible?" he asked.

"Yes, sir; leastways Miss Stretton. Miss Verner's not out of her room, sir. She was taken very ill last

night."

"Ill, how?" exclaimed Brooke, whose heart stood still for an instant of agony. Had he delayed too long in cowardly dread of losing her? was this the beginning of the end?

"She was taken faint, sir, like she was before, only a good bit worse, and she was awful frightened herself

of things coming a-near her, she said."

"Let Miss Stretton know I am here," said Brooke, walking into the well-known drawing-room. "Ask her

if she will be so good as to see me."

He felt beside himself for an instant. It took all his power of self-mastery, all his consciousness that on his own courage and coolness every thing depended, to control the emotion which shook him.

Miss Stretton did not keep him long waiting. She entered looking wan and worn, as if with watching, her

eyes red-rimmed and dull.

"Oh! Dr. Brooke, we have had such a fright. I was on the point of sending for you, only they said you were away in London."

"How is she now?" asked Brooke abruptly, and looking at her as if he were ready to devour her

words.

"Better, thank God! She has slept quite quietly since between three and four this morning; now she has had some tea and toast, and is reading in bed. I have insisted on her staying there to-day."

"Tell me how she was affected," asked Brooke,

drawing a chair near the sofa on which Miss Stretton

had sunk.

"We had had quite a happy day. Mr. Kharapet quite went in with my idea of moving to town, and we agreed to go in next week and meet him to look for a house. Stasie was in very good spirits, and talked a little of going on the Continent; she ate her dinner, and in short was quite herself, when about seven o'clock, when we were having tea, she grew quite silent and still. I didn't mind her, for Mr. Kharapet was giving us a most interesting description of a school for converted Jews at Baghdad, when all of a sudden Stasie stood up and tried to walk towards me, staggering in the strangest way; then she sat down and said there was a wild black cat in the room that frightened her, and a snake, and caught at the sofa cushions, her hands twitching and her eyes staring awfully. Mr. Kharapet was quite frightened. We tried to give her some brandy, but she could not take it; then she went into a dead faint and lay insensible, I do not know how long; at last she came to, and we got her to bed. I do not think I ever was so terrified. Of course we sent off for Dr. Hunter, but he had been called. For some time my poor dear Stasie was very uneasy, so terrible giddy she would not let go my hand, at last she fell asleep, and she seems much better than I could have hoped this morning."

"A very extraordinary scizure," said Brooke as she paused; he felt himself grow pale as she described the symptoms which confirmed his worst fears. "What

had she eaten?"

"Nothing but roast fowl and a simple pudding; there was currie; she did not take any, which was unusual—and she has taken her medicine quite regularly."

"Will you allow me to see the prescription?" asked Brooke, determined to put an end to this danger at

any rate.

"Certainly," replied Miss Stretton, who proceeded to unlock the drawer of a writing-table and take out an

envelope, which she handed to him; he opened it and

read the contents gravely.

"This must be discontinued at present," he said with authority. "I would not let Miss Verner touch it till she has seen Filmer again."

"Very well," said Miss Stretton submissively.

"Give her something very simple, such as your English cook can prepare, when she needs nourishment."
Brooke stopped, overwhelmed with the sense of his own impotence to guard or watch over her. "I wish I could see her; I fancy I might prescribe something myself. I have seen attacks like this "——again he stopped abruptly, just saving himself from adding the words "in India," which, if repeated to Kharapet, might awaken him to the fact that he (Brooke) was on the watch.

"I will go and tell Stasie; she may get up in the afternoon."

Brooke paced the room. This attack explained Kharapet's warning of the night before, "Khabar-dār!" Bhoodhoo had been going too fast; the instigator of the crime did not wish the end just yet! When should he see her? when should he have the opportunity of pleading with her, for her life and his own?

"Stasie desires her kind regards; she feels so tired she does not think she will come down-stairs to-day; Mrs. Harding is with her just now-she will be glad to see you to-morrow. Do you know, Dr. Brooke, I do not imagine she has an idea how ill she has been; she is talking quite comfortably about moving into town."

"Better she should not think of her own condition," said Brooke. "Keep her as quiet as you can." He took up his hat. "I shall call to inquire in the course of the day, and shall hope to see Miss Verner to-morrow."

It was a relief to be out of the house, to stride across the fields in the open, and then what a crowd of ideas thronged his brain. At all hazards Stasie must be removed, and he began busily to construct the details of a plan by which her flight might be kept secret for a week or two. This was all important, in order that by no legal quibble, no chicanery or twisting of the law as it affects minors, should Stasie be for an hour alone in the presence or power of Kharapet. Sometimes a glimpse of the possible heaven awaiting him beyond the dangers of the present struck him with

a lightning flash of almost painful delight.

At last he found himself miles from Limeville, and, retracing his steps, sought some support in a talk with his cousin. She was deeply concerned about Stasie, but less alarmed than Miss Stretton, not having been present when the attack came on. She was very anxious to know Brooke's opinion, but he committed himself to nothing, waiting to see what to-morrow would bring forth. He called more than once at Lime-ville, where he was made very welcome by poor Miss Stretton, who was thankful to have a sympathetic listener. Her report of the invalid was better each time. So the weary day wore through.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

WHETHER from fatigue or mental exhaustion, Brooke slept better than he had done for weeks that night, and consequently woke calmer, stronger, and less despair-

ing.

While waiting impatiently till it was time to see Stasie, sitting, as was his wont, in a large window which looked upon the main road, he saw, to his surprise, Miss Stretton walking in the direction of the station, with her "rain-cloak" over her arm. He caught up his hat and followed her.

"Ah! Dr. Brooke!" she exclaimed, as he overtook her, "I have a very good report to give you. Stasie is quite like herself this morning. She is up and dressed. She slept well, and has eaten a new-laid egg for her breakfast."

"I am rejoiced to hear it! Are you going to town?"
"Yes. I had quite a consultation with Mrs. Harding last night. (They have been most kind!) And as dear Stasie is so anxious to leave this, I am going to look at a house and furnished apartments which Mr. Harding saw advertised in the *Times*. I feel quite nervous myself about staying on here. I am sure Stasie will be better and more cheerful in town, so I thought it better to go at once. Mrs. Harding has promised to stay with Stasie."

"Is it too early to call on Miss Verner?"

"Oh, no! You will rouse her and amuse her. She always enjoys a talk with you."

"I will first see you into the train."

Miss Stretton was flattered, and they talked very amicably together. The timid spinster informed Brooke that she expected Mr. Kharapet to meet and assist her in her choice of a residence. "For, I must confess, Dr. Brooke, I shrink from responsibility."

Having seen Miss Stretton off, Brooke walked at what he intended to be a slow pace towards Limeville, but he soon found himself involuntarily hastening his steps. If Mrs. Harding was already with Stasie, surely she would give him a chance of speaking alone with

her?

But he was at her gate, and this time was admitted by Bhoodhoo, who informed him, with a gentle kindly smile, "that missee Sshib was much better, and so every one was better." Brooke did not trust himself

to reply.

Stasie was half-sitting, half-reclining, in her favorite corner of a large old-fashioned sofa, her work-basket beside her, and a book in her hand. She wore a warm winter dress of dark gray; a cravatte of soft old lace round her throat; her hair rather loosely drawn back, showing the graceful curved line of its growth round the temples. She was very pale, and her eyes looked heavy; but she smiled brightly as she held out her hand to him.

"I hope I have not come too early, Miss Verner? but I have been desperately anxious to see you."

His eyes seconded his words; they dwelt on hers eagerly, intensely, compelling them, as it were, to meet

his gaze.
"You are very good," she said languidly. "I am really quite well, that is, as well as I have been at any

time since I was at Southsea; "she sighed.

"That is not saying much! But are you quite free from giddiness and the unpleasant sensations in your head?"

"Yes, quite. I do not think I was so ill as they fancied, but I feel dull and weak." There was a pause; Brooke drew a chair opposite her, and, looking round, said—"I expected to find Mrs. Harding here."

"I have just had this note from her;" and Stasie, who seemed averse to speak more than she could help, handed it to him, and he read—"DEAREST STASIE—I am very vexed that Mr. Harding wants me to go into town with him to see to some alternations at York Gate. I hope to return early, and will come to you. In the meantime send for Mademoiselle, if you do not like to be alone."

"She must have gone by the nine train," said Brooke, returning the note, "for I have just seen your aunt off, and Mrs. Harding was not there."

"Yes. I fancy this note was forgotten till just now;

I have only had it a few minutes."

There was a pause, interrupted by the entrance of Bhoodhoo carrying Pearl, who had just been washed, and was looking miserable. Brooke, by an instinctive movement took the dog, before Bhoodhoo was near the sofa, and held the little creature, who looked up at him trembling from among its long hair.

"Will the missee Sahib have some nice soup presently?" Brooke listened anxiously for the reply.

"No, thank you, Bhoodhoo; I shall not want any thing till dinner time. I shall not dine till two, for Mrs. Harding or Mademoiselle will dine with me."

Bhoodhoo salaamed and retired.

"This little animal is not half dry," said Brooke, considerably relieved by Stasie's words. "I will put him before the fire. There, Pearl, good dog! lie still."

Pearl found the warmth very agreeable, and soon

settled himself to sleep without further discipline.

Then there was another pause, most oppressive to

Brooke, whose heart was too full for words.

At length Stasie, leaning her head languidly against the cushion beside her, said quietly, naturally—"People cannot make wills before they are twenty-one, can they?"

"No! Why do you ask? you do not want to make

yours?"

"Yes, I do," looking at him with a pleasant smile.
"I should like Mrs. Matthews and Ella to have some

of my money if I die."

"But you must not, *shall* not die," cried Brooke with sudden passion, starting up and leaning against the mantelpiece, looking down upon her with an expression of pain and tenderness. Something in his tone stirred Stasie's heart, and as she met his eyes she raised her head and exclaimed with animation—

"I believe you can cure me! No one else seems to

understand how ill I am, not even I myself'!"

"How can it be otherwise?" returned Brooke, mastering his agitation, and compelling himself to speak calmly, while he moved nearer, and bending one knee on a footstool before her, took both her hands gently between his own. "How can it be otherwise, when my life is bound up in yours? Yes! Stasie, I can save you, if you will give me the right to watch over you night and day, a right with which none can interfere!"

Stasie was silent from astonishment—astonishment so great that it had no room for shyness or embarrassment. She left her hands unresistingly in his, and his clasp grew closer as he went on. "I do not dare to suppose that you love me, but if—if you are indiffer-

ent to others—if your heart is all your own—a love so strong as mine must win yours! I entreat you, do not reject me! my life has been one agony of fear, and, scarcely hope, since I come down here, anticipating this moment! look into my eyes, Stasie! and read more than my lips can tell!"

His whole aspect indeed attested the truth of his expressions; the veins on his somewhat rugged temples showed themselves, as if swollen by the quick tide of feverish circulation; the hands that grasped Stasie's

shook slightly.

She was overwhelmed by the sight of a man ordinarily so calm, so self-controlled, to whom she looked up as to something above the common, thus overmastered by his emotion, and all for her! Still surprise was her strongest impression, only a subtle delightful glow of pride and joy and tenderness began to spread itself through her heart.

"And you feel all this for me?" she exclaimed at length in a low soft tone, looking straight into his eyes with her honest earnest glance for a second, before it drooped and turned away. "Why do you care for me

so much?"

"How is it possible to explain the attraction one nature has for another?" Brooke returned, a sense of hope, of possible success sending new fire along his veins. "I might tell you that you are fair and sweet enough to be the desire of any man's heart; but you are more than this to me! I have no hope, no ambition, no future unconnected with you in my heart, and with me, Stasie, you will regain your glorious health, your full power of enjoyment; speak to me, Stasie?"

She had gently withdrawn her hands, and held them clasped upon her knee. "I do not love you now," she said slowly, and raising her eyes to his again. "I did not think you cared for me. But if, oh! if you love me so much, I will love you—love you well!" She held out her hands to him with an inexpressibly noble, rank gesture of acceptance. Brooke kissed them with

passionate delight, but felt he was only half through his difficulties.

"Then, Stasie, I have your promise that you will be

my wife? and that soon—very soon?"

"Why so very soon?" she asked, withdrawing her hands again, while he rose and sat down beside her. "I think an engagement must be very pleasant, people get to know each other. Ella Mathews and Mr. Baldwin used to be very happy, and—"

"But, dearest, I do not think we are bound to arrange our plans on the lines laid down by Mr. and Mrs Baldwin," interrupted Brooke, who watched with eager satisfaction the brighter look, the healthier color, that had come into her eyes and cheek. "You are very differently situated. You have no real home, and I may have to return to India. Shall you object to going to India?"

"No," with a smile and quick soft blush, "though I am not so fond of Eastern things and people as I used

to be."

"Ah! you feel you have an enemy in that villain

Kharapet?"

Stasie hesitated a moment, and her lip quivered. "I am foolish, perhaps, but I do fear him. I cannot tell why;" and, unconsciously, she drew a little nearer to Brooke.

"My darling," he cried, unable longer to resist his intense longing to hold her in his arms, though half afraid of startling her, he drew her gently to him, till

her cheek lay against his heart.

"It is a true instinct! Hear me. I have reason to know that we must expect strong opposition from every one. From Mr. Harding because he does not wish you to marry any one for years to come; from Kharapet because you have rejected him (dog! that he should dare to raise his eyes to you), and because he is brewing devilish plots; from your guardian, because the others will influence him; from every one."
"From Mrs. Harding?" asked Stasie, strangely

tempted to stay where she was and feel the strong throbbing of his heart, which made her own beat in

sympathy.

"Mrs. Harding? oh, no. In her I have my best friend. I know I have her best wishes for my success with you. But I must speak plainly, Stasie; every thing depends on our keeping our engagement profoundly secret for a short time."

"Why?" asked Stasie with natural surprise, and disengaging herself from him; "why should they object to you? you are as much a gentleman as I am a lady; indeed I dare say you are better born. They can only worry a little, which will not signify

much."

"Ah, Stasie! I am aware I am no great match; as far as worldly advantages go, you might do much better than marry me; but I cannot be unselfish where you are concerned."

Stasie smiled an arch sweet smile. "I so hate

having to conceal any thing."

Brooke felt he was getting into the thick of it. He rose and walked once up and down the room, then reseating himself by her, he said gravely, "You say, dear, you will trust your future life to me. Is it too much then to be guided by me in our preliminary action? can you not believe that I have good and sufficient reasons for what I suggest? reasons which, when I explain them to you hereafter, you will acknowledge were all-sufficient. Can you have faith enough in me for this?"

"Yes, I can," said Stasie thoughtfully; "but I am

puzzled."

"I am going to put your confidence in me to a still severer test," said Brooke, watching her countenance anxiously, and urged by an irresistible prompting from within to risk all in this first momentous interview.

"What is it?" asked Stasie nervously.

"I want you," said Brooke, speaking very low and distinctly, "I want you not only to keep our engage-

ment secret, but to marry me soon, in about three weeks or so—privately—unknown to any one, and to come away with me somewhere until we are discovered, which of course we shall be before long; then no one can separate us, for you know the difficulties which

surround the marriage of a minor are great."

"You ask me to run away with you," exclaimed Stasie, coloring to the roots of her hair, even down to where the lace wrapped her creamy throat. "To deceive Aunt Clem, who is so kind, and Mrs. Harding, and— You propose this. I can scarce believe it. It is too extraordinary; you must have some reason, some very powerful reason; tell me what it is?"

"I have an all-powerful reason," returned Brooke; "one that you will acknowledge is sufficient, but I do

not wish to tell it to you now."

"You must, you ought," said Stasie very gravely.
"You ask me to take a terrible step, and I believe in you so much that I feel sure you have some reason that seems good to you, but," hesitating a little, and timidly, "I may not think so, and indeed you must tell me."

"You have every right to ask, dearest," leaning his arm on the back of the sofa so as to draw nearer to her, and feeling that the tug of war had come. "It is most natural that such a proposition should raise the gravest doubts in your mind. I can but implore you to trust me: my conscience acquits me of any intention that is not blameless. Passionately as I love you, it is not the impatience of a lover that induces me to urge you to what you justly call a terrible step, but the forethought, the anxious care of a friend who would save you from—well, serious inconvenience. Will you not trust me, Stasie?"

She looked at him searchingly, then covering her face with her hands, exclaimed, "It would be too shameful, before you have even asked my guardian's consent, which he *might* give. Oh! I do trust you; but there are some things of which none but one's own

self can judge, and this is one. If I could speak to

Mrs. Harding!"

"Have you more confidence in her than in me?" asked Brooke, more as a special pleader than from any movement of jealousy; he had quite expected this resistance, distressing as it was. Stasie was not the kind of girl to be carried away by the first impassioned words of a lover. She was silent. "Have you more confidence in her?" repeated Brooke.

"Yes, in this matter; she is a woman," said Stasie

slowly.

"I would gladly consult and confide in Mrs. Harding," resumed Brooke, "but that I fear to expose her to her husband's brutal bad temper; and I am convinced that if I did tell her all, she would be on my side."

"No, we must not get her into a scrape," returned

Stasie.

Brooke pleaded long and earnestly; he succeeded in making a certain impression, in creating serious uneasiness in Stasie's mind. She was not angry with him for what seemed to her so strange, so daring a proposition, but she could not conquer her repugnance to it. It was this shrinking from what seemed bold and indelicate, more than any distrust of him, that held her back.

Indeed, she had always looked up to him as the embodiment of all that was high-minded and cultivated, and the sudden revelation of his passionate love for herself, his strong emotion, his extreme tenderness, had shaken her mental equilibrium, and set her pulses throbbing with a fearful delight; but she did not lose her head so completely as to be blind to the reality of such a step as Brooke urged her to take, nor was she anxious to rush into marriage. A pleasant interval of companionship, time to know each other, to grow familiar, seemed to her desirable, as it is to most thoughtful girls. She felt too that he had gained immense sudden influence over her by the irresistible conviction of his great earnestness, which every word and look conveyed, and she half feared to yield to it.

Brooke too had patience with the scruples he respected, yet even his self-control began to fray out. She might trust him, she was a trifle too prudent, and time was so precious. He was almost tempted to tell her the truth, but a double fear held him back—first, lest he should seem wanting in coolness of judgment, and so be lowered in her estimation, should she disbelieve his theory of Kharapet's designs; secondly, if she accepted it, the strain on her sorely-tried nerves might be terribly injurious.

Finally Stasie, much moved by the look of despondency, almost despair, in Brooke's eyes, proposed to think over his proposition and give him a decided

answer to-morrow.

"It will not be easy to see you alone," he said

dejectedly.

"I can go and see Mrs. Harding, and—and you might be there and walk back with me," suggested

Stasie, looking down.

"I have no doubt I shall manage it," said Brooke, smiling; "but we must be very cautious for the present. One promise you will give me, dearest; do not let this day's post pass without writing to your friend Mrs. Mathews; ask her to invite you as soon as possible. Nothing will do you so much good as change of air; besides, if you yield to my most ardent prayer, it will suit my plans to have you away from Sefton Park."

Stasie promised readily, and after a little more conversation, which, however, was slightly chilled by the

difference between them, Brooke rose.

"I suppose I must go. Bloodhoo, and even the amiable Mary, will report the unconscionable length of my visit. And Stasie, my own darling (you are my own, are you not?), you will try to bring your mind to what I ask. You do not doubt that I think of you more than of myself?"

"I do not indeed; but do-do tell me why you

ask such an extraordinary proof of my trust."

"Not now, I must not. Good-by. I may come in this afternoon, I suppose, when Mrs. Harding is here. I could not stay away," kissing her hands, and then looking imploringly at her.

"I dare say you may," stepping back shyly.

There was a pause; Brooke half turned to go, then, springing to her side, he suddenly caught her in his arms and strained her to his heart. "By heaven! Stasie," he exclaimed in deep hurried tones of passionate entreaty, impressive resolve, "I cannot leave you. I will not let you go until you promise, solemnly promise to do exactly as I desire in this matter. My love! my life! you do not know what depends on your decision. I only seek your welfare, your safety." He held her close, looking down into her eyes.

A strange thrill of conviction quivered through Stasie's heart. Brooke had some knowledge she did

not possess.

"You fear something," she exclaimed, clinging to him. "You fear, like me, you do not know what; you fear for me?"

"I do; and I know what I fear." Stasie grew very pale, her lips quivered, her slender fingers clutched

his arm.

"I will go with you," she whispered. "You are not easily frightened; it is something real. I have had strange thoughts sometimes, and life is very sweet."

"It is," he exclaimed; "and it shall be sweet to you, if it is in the power of man to make it so. You will then consent to a private marriage as soon as it can possibly take place? you will be guided by me in all things?"

"I will," returned Stasie, trembling as she leant against him. "I wish I could go away now. Could I not live with Mrs. Mathews till you get my guardian's

consent?"

"You will be better, safer with me, darling," cried

Brooke, overjoyed at this sudden solution of his great difficulty.

"I should like to go away before Hormuz comes back. He hates me, I know he hates me. He will

not come back for a few days,"

"Then you can very well manage it. Write to Mrs. Mathews now, this moment—I will post the letter—you can have a reply the day after to-morrow, and start the following day."

Stasie at once sat down to her writing-table and rapidly traced a few lines, expressing her great need of change, and begging leave to come to her friends at

once.

Brooke stood at a little distance, watching her with deepest delight, hardly able to belive that the moment of deliverance was at hand. Her fears were all directed to Kharapet; she did not seem to doubt Bhoodhoo; so much the better, she would be at rest comparatively. And after the emphatic warning Brooke had overheard Kharapet address to his tool, the latter would not attempt much for the next few days, after which danger would be at an end.

"Will that do?" said Stasie, handing him her letter, with a simple cofidence which touched him. Brooke

glanced through it.

"It will do perfectly, seal it up and I will take it away at once. And now, my own! my love! you must give me one kiss, just one before I go, and say 'Jim, I love you.'"

Stasic hesitated; her sweet mouth quivered, she stretched out her arms, and with a burst of tears exclaimed, "I love you, Jim, for loving me so much!"

When she recovered herself a little she was strangely reluctant to be left alone. "I wish you could stay," she said.

"So do I," returned Brooke. "Suppose you come

out with me; I will walk with you to Sefton House,

and then go on to the post."

Stasie gladly accepted the proposition. She was thoroughly unhinged; the vague fear and dislike she had conceived of Kharapet had suddenly suggested the solution of Brooke's extraordinary and passionately-expressed desire that she should consent to a secret marriage and escape with him—from what, if not from some dreadful design of Kharapet's? The idea that a man so rational, so experienced as Brooke, should be ready to act on what she resisted as a morbid fancy, alarmed her profoundly. He must know more than he chose to say. She was well aware that Kharapet had great influence on Mr. Harding, and was all potent with her aunt. No one distrusted him save herself and Mrs. Harding; she felt therefore in

some measure in his power.

What a strange, disturbed, anxious, thrilling day it had been! thought Stasie, when at an unusually early hour she escaped to her room. The sudden revelation of Brooke's love for her was bewildering, yet how her heart had leaped to answer his call upon it! She was half frightened to think how utterly, completely, she was his. To look back a few months, which seemed to have flown so fast, and which yet for her had been a whole cycle of life, and recall that first vision of him at Lady Elizabeth's conversazione, when she wondered who he could be, putting him down in her own mind as proud, cold, stern, and to-day he had trembled at her touch, and humbly begged for an assurance of her love. Again and again she lived over the strange experience of being folded in his arms, and wondered at the sense of safety, of delight, his embrace had given her. She would never feel at rest until Brooke had the right to stand between her and her enemy, if indeed Kharapet was the bitter enemy that from time to time she fancied him to be. This she had often doubted, but now that Brooke was evidently of the same opinion, she was convinced that the

dim fancies which had agitated her were shadows of a

reality.

Yet the idea of marrying under such circumstances tormented her; what would Mrs. Harding think? what would Aunt Clem say? How could she ever convey to them the hunted, terrified feeling, which made her ready to take refuge with Brooke, the only creature who seemed to perceive her need of help and protection! No matter, life was sweet; how sweet it would be with him! She would risk every thing and be guided by his counsels.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

That evening, while Stasie communed with her own heart, and Aunt Clem poured out to the sympathetic Susan her fears that her dear niece was far from strong—"She looked perfectly worn out, and I am sure the sooner she is away from this place the better," etc. etc.—Brooke was busy writing at one table, and his friend Robinson at another, with notes letters, memoranda scattered about. "Robby," said the the former looking up suddenly, "I must leave in a few days. I shall have to go over to Paris, and I have matters to arrange previously in town."

"This is very sudden," cried Robinson, pausing, pen in hand. "I am very sorry; I shall miss you very much, old fellow! What is taking you away?"

"Business," returned Brooke briefly.

"I ought to ask why you staid rather than why you leave," continued Robinson, nibbling the top of his pen. "I must say I have wondered why you came here."

"Your modesty, Robby! Don't you know I wanted

to enjoy your society?"

"Well, joking apart, it has been a treat to me, and the place will be awfully dull when you go."

"I don't think I have been a particularly lively

companion," returned Brooke, smiling grimly.

"Even so," replied Robinson with friendly candor. "It is not good for man to live alone."

"Oh! you have quite come to that conclusion?"

"Yes!" said Mr. Robinson, blushing. "It is, I believe, a very distinct injunction."

"To all, priests included?" asked Brooke.

"After mature reflection, I am convinced it is especially needful that priests should set an example of family life," said the young incumbent. Brooke smiled, indulgently this time, and resumed his writing; then after a few minutes' silence, "I think I shall stay in town for a few nights and go on to Paris next week."

"And then?"

"Oh, I shall ultimately return to London."

"Mrs. Harding will miss you," said Robinson with a glance at his friend.

"Yes, I dare say," replied Brooke carelessly.

Little more passed between them that evening. Brooke was up at cock-crow next morning, and infinitely to the disgust of Mrs. Harris (who had formed a high opinion of her young master's stately, silent, but civil guest), departed for town before breakfast could be prepared. "There's just one thing I can't abide; it's to see any one go out on an empty stomach," she grumbled to Mr. Robinson as that gentleman sipped his coffee an hour after. "It's just preparing one's self for fever and blood-poisoning, and every thing that's bad."

Arrived in London, after a hasty breakfast at his club and a visit to his lodgings, where he occupied himself with a re-arrangement of his baggage, Brooke sallied forth and walked quietly down Piccadilly. Near the circus he was stopped by a young man in

civilian dress but of soldierly carriage, who exclaimed, "Brooke! I fancied you were in Scotland! at least they thought so at the club! I wanted to look you up directly I came to town. Where have you been?"

"Ah, Thornton! when did you arrive?"

"About ten days ago. I have made a trading voyage of it home. My people were at Florence; then we went into the Tyrol for the summer, had a peep at Vienna, up the Danube to Passau, etc., and now I have run over here for a week or two on business, and

return to Paris the day after to-morrow."

After some exchange of question and answer respecting their mutual friends (the young man was a captain in Brooke's regiment), Thornton seemed disposed to attach himself to his newly discovered acquaintance, but Brooke soon disposed of him. "Sorry I am particularly engaged to-day and to-morrow, my dear fellow! but give me your address in Paris. I may be there next month."

"You'll be sure to call," said Thornton, writing on the back of one of his cards; "my mother will be de-

lighted to see you."

Brooke thanked him, put the card carefully in his pocket-book, and, hailing a hansom, ordered the driver to Dalston, somewhat to the surprise of his friend, who

stood on the curb to see him drive off.

"The journey," almost "due north" was long and tedious, affording ample time to the traveler to meditate and arrange a somewhat complicated scheme, by which he hoped to steal a march on the enemy, and secure at least a fortnight of undisturbed happiness with his bride! It was almost incredible that he had cleared 'the difficulties, before which his spirit had quailed, at a bound. Stasie's curious instinctive dread of Kharapet had befriended him marvelously. But for that sudden revelation, that unexpected lifting of the cloud of hesitation and distrust by the pale specter of terror, he could never have persuaded her against her better judgment; but now he felt sure of her, and

his heart throbbed with pride and joy as the idea suggested itself, that she loved him better than she was herself aware!

But he resisted the tendency to dwell upon these delicious reminiscences, and set himself to think out steadily the details of his plan. His first care must be to lull suspicion as regarded himself. He must seem to leave London so soon as he was sure the day was fixed for Stasie's departure, and he must be resident for two or three weeks in any parish where his marriage was to take place; round these leading lines the whole scheme must form itself. He had no particular business, nothing on hands that necessitated the forwarding of letters; he might safely lose himself, and he could think of no more remote or unexplored region than that towards which he was now traveling. He never had known any one who had visited it, or come from it, and he only knew the name from seeing it on the map of London, or in the Registrar-General's report. There, at least, he could find obscurity, safety, and happiness. "Here we are, sir, where to now?" said the driver looking down through the trap-door at the top.

"Whereabouts is the parish church?" was the coun-

ter-question.

"Don't know, sir. These parts is strange to me."

"Draw up. I'll ask myself."

Cabby obeyed. Brooke descended to make inquiries at a large grocery establishment. "The old parish church, sir?" said a stout, important-looking man, in a white apron, coming forward, as he noticed the boy behind the counter hesitate in his reply. "Why, it's more than two mile further on."

"Then, may I ask, what is the nearest church-

where you attend yourself?"

"Oh, I go to Mr. Sims', the Congregational Chapel in Hill's Place, sir; but there is a big church, St. Barnabas, about twenty minutes' walk from this, where there is an excellent preacher, the reverend Mr. Philips."

"Oh, indeed! and is it much attended? It is a district church, I suppose?"
"It is, sir."

"I suppose they have christenings, and marriages, and funerals there?"

"Plenty of marriages and christenings, sir.

funerals are conducted in the cemetery."

"Thank you! I am very much obliged. Pray, which

is the way to this church?"

"Drive straight down this street to the end, where there is a broad road crossing it, turn left and then take the second to the right; you will see the church before you."

Brooke thanked him courteously, and, leaving the shop, conveyed these directions to Jehu; then, jumping

in, they drove off smartly.

"I wonder what that tall grand-looking chap is after?" said the jovial master of the establishment. "Has he a baby to christen, or a parent to bury?"

"Maybe he has a young lady to marry on the sly?" suggested the elder assistant. "He looks a reg'lar west-end swell." The master and his men chuckled over the notion, and business resumed its sway.

Meantime Brooke's conveyance stopped before the church, and Brooke, descending, asked, "How much?"

"Six-and-six, sir. It's a long stretch," said the driver tentatively. Brooke paid without a question, being averse to impress himself on the man's memory. "Thank'ee, sir." Brooke left him rather ostentatiously rubbing his horse's head and neck, as if the animal had been over-driven, and strolled round the handsome edifice, which was environed by a border of grass, with posts and chains. A semi-circle of new houses, of a higher class than those in the neighborhood, partially surrounded it; Brooke noticed on one of them the inscription, "St. Barnabas Parsonage;" then, after standing for a moment in deep thought, he turned briskly down one of the streets leading from "Granville Crescent," as the semi-circle was named, and walked briskly for a few minutes, looking sharply

right to left, as he went, at the houses.

He was seeking for lodgings, and seemed very hard to please, when he found a locality where frequent announcements of "apartments" adorned the windows.

He seemed more interested in the landladies than their rooms; some of scrupulous cleanliness and neatness rather took his fancy; but when the mistress of the house appeared severe, metallic, unbending, or dressy, smiling, and over-gracious, he declined to decide, and retreated rapidly. He had thus visited five or six abodes -all, as their owners declared, perfect in their appointments, their order, their freedom from noxious insects, etc., and still he was unsuited. He was, in truth, anxious respecting the aspect of the landlady, for he knew that he should be obliged to place Stasie alone in whatever rooms he chose, for at least part of a day and night, and he was keenly alive to the unavoidable pain and discomfort she must endure even under the most favorable arrangements. He, therefore, sought eagerly for a motherly respectable-looking hostess, who could be some stay to his fiancée. How shameful, how infamous, that she should be obliged to save her life at the cost of such concealment!

But time was pressing; he wanted to be at Limeville that afternoon, and he must engage a lodging be-

fore he returned.

At length he reached a neat row of semi-detached villas with gardens, and in the window of one he discovered an affiche.

"You have rooms to let?" he asked, as the door

was opened by a diminutive but tidy servant.

"Yes, sir? walk in, please, and I'll call missis." Brooke was beginning to be tired and impatient of the oft-repeated formula. Immediately, from some region below, arose a stout, fresh, kindly-looking, brown-eyed person, not quite a lady, but above the average letter of lodgings. She was very neatly dressed in a clean print and a black apron. With pleasant courtesy she

showed Brooke a bright, if somewhat gaudy parlor, lighted by a bay-window, and a fairly comfortable bedroom behind it. Brooke paused in deep thought as she named a moderate price enough for the accommodation, and the good woman, fancying he hesitated at the terms, observed, "Of course, sir, if it were for a permanency that would make a difference."

"It will not be for more than three weeks or a month," said Brooke, rousing himself. "May I ask if you have

any children?"

"Not young children, sir. I have two girls; one goes to school, and the eldest is daily governess in a family close by."

That sounded well. Brooke liked the aspect of the house and its owner. "I will take your rooms," he

said, "from the day after to-morrow."

"Very well," with a little hesitation; "but I have been

advised always to ask for references."

"A necessary precaution," said Brooke, with a smile.

"There is my card. I will write the address of my agents, Messrs. Grindlay, on the back, they will answer for me; but as I am a total stranger to you I will pay a week's rent in advance," taking out his purse. "I shall, probably, not come in till Monday next, but I am your tenant from Saturday."

"Well, sir, I can have no objection as you are so straightforward; sit down for a minute or two till I

write a receipt."

But Brooke was too restless and excited to rest quiet—he paced the room. He congratulated himself on its cheerful outlook, as a street opening in front showed a glimpse of the church. He pictured to himself Stasie's embarassment and trepidation at arriving there alone. It would be a tremendous trial for her, yet he could not help a thrill of delight at the idea of consoling and encouraging her. While he thought thus he heard the door open, and turning met a very pretty, dark-eyed, lady-like girl face to face; she was well and quietly dressed in outdoor attire. "I

beg your pardon," blushing, "I thought my mother was here."

Brooke made her a low bow and she went quickly

away. "The very place," he murmured.

His new landlady soon returned, smiling and contented. "Here is the receipt, sir, and my card, and what would you like for dinner, sir, on Monday? and

what hour are you likely to come in?"

"I will write you all particulars," said Brooke, putting away the receipt and card, on which was printed, "Mrs. Hicks, 9 Alma Villas, Dalston," carefully in a breast pocket, "and now I must bid you good morning."

"And I trust you will find yourself comfortable in

my house, sir."

"I have no doubt I shall."

Brooke, observing it was not a neighborhood where cabs were to be found, asked his way to the nearest omnibus line, and walked off rapidly.

Aunt Clem had only been partially successful in her house-hunting, and Stasie was too much upset, too visibly unwell, to hear any description of the chase on her return.

Next morning, however, our heroine woke up wonderfully refreshed and strengthened. Her first thought was that she had given her solemn promise to Brooke, and that in a sense she belonged to him—a thought that had less of fear and more of joy than it possessed yesterday. She was also less impressed by her own vague terror of Kharapet, but deeply convinced that Brooke knew something very important, very inimical to her own welfare, or he would never urge her to so desperate a step as an elopement! She could scarce bear to think of it. How ardently she longed to see Brooke's face, to hear his voice; nothing else could give her courage. But he had told her he would not be with her till the afternoon, so Stasie composed her-

self to listen attentively to her aunt, towards whom her heart swelled with repentant tenderness, as she thought what a state the poor lady would be in when she found herself deserted and deceived.

"You must be so tired, auntie, after your long day vesterday," she said kindly, putting a footstool under

Miss Stretton's feet.

"Yes, my dear, I am; but the worst was to find you looking like a ghost when I came back. You are quite a different being this morning. Were you too much

by yourself?"

"Oh, no; Dr. Brooke," turning to fetch her work-basket, "came in; he expected to find Mrs. Harding here; and then I went to see Mademoiselle Aubert, and walked with her and the children; then Mrs. Harding came back. It does me so much good to go out.

Now tell me all you did."

"Well, my love, if there is any thing more exhausting than another, it is looking for houses; going up and down-stairs, and being worried with the caretakers, who always try and put you against the place. I saw very nice apartments in Upper Baker street that would suit perfectly well, and we might just keep Mary as a ladies' maid; but Mr. Kharapet is dead against apartments; he thinks you ought to have a house of your own now."

"Don't mind him, auntie; just choose what you

like."

"Rather what you like, my dear! I cannot decide on any thing without you."

"I am sure you may. I shall like whatever you

choose."

"It is very sweet of you to say so, dear. But don't you think we should be quite comfortable in lodgings?"

"Yes," thoughtfully; "only I should not like to send away Bhoodhoo, poor fellow: what would become of him?"

"Well, Stasie, we really cannot arrange our plans merely to provide for Bhoodhoo."

"Perhaps not."

"It is all very well to be so very considerate for others, but there is a duty," etc., etc. Stasie heard the murmur of her aunt's refined and somewhat monotonous voice, but, deep in her own thoughts, lost all consciousness of what she was saying, till roused by the cessation of sound.

"Ah, auntie, how I wish I were of age!"

"Why, Stasie?" in some surprise.

"Oh! I should like to give you some money, what they call settle it upon you, or leave it to you in my will, so that you should never be obliged to live in a

miserable patched-up bedroom again."

"My dear child! my sweet Stasie!" rising to kiss her, and then resuming her seat. "You are kind and thoughtful beyond your years: I am deeply touched by your affectionate care. Do not trouble about me, my love! The Lord will provide; and in any case that good, kind Mr. Kharapet would be a true friend."

"Do you think Hormuz would do any thing for you? or give you a farthing of my money if I were gone? for all mine would be his. You little know him. Why, Aunt Clem, don't you see he is a mass of spite and

selfishness? He hates me, and-"

"Stasie, Stasie! You must have lost your senses to talk in this way of your best friend! You used to be quite fond of him," cried Miss Stretton, aghast at such unholy sentiments.

"Friend!" cried Stasie, bursting into tears. "I have not a real friend in the world but you and Mrs. Harding. Even Mrs. Mathews does not care for me as much

as she used!"

"My darling child! You are not at all yourself! You are weak and low. Do have a little sal volatile or camphor, or—dear me—I was in hopes you were ever so much better this morning. Do let me send for Dr. Hunter."

"No, no, no," said Stasie, trying to recover herself.

"He could do nothing. I am only weak and stupid. I am so sure that nothing will do me good but change that I wrote yesterday to Mrs. Mathews asking leave

to go down to her for a week or two."

"Very right, dear," cried Miss Stretton, too startled and uneasy to object to any thing. "I am sure it will do you good; and if she cannot take you in we will just pack up and go to Aix-les-Bains or—or—Cannes, or Mentone—or any where. Why should you be moped to death here for any one's fancies? You may count on me, my dear, dear Stasie! I will submit to any sacrifice for your sake!"

Embraces and tears ensued, and Stasie, glancing at the clock, saw to her delight that the hand pointed to

three.

"I think I will go and ask Mrs. Harding to walk with me," said Stasie restlessly. She felt as if she could not meet Brooke in her aunt's presence, and that he would be sure to follow her to Sefton House.

"Very well, dear! I dare say you will find Dr. Brooke there. I fancy he is there most of his time."

"Not more than he is here," replied Stasie, unable

to let this pass.

"Perhaps not! Mrs. Harding is here nearly as

much as in her own house."

"Aunt," said Stasie, coloring crimson. "I am sure you are quite mistaken. I do not believe Dr. Brooke thinks of his cousin as——in the way you im-

agine!"

"Well, then, what makes him stay down here? I am sure I hope you are right. I can't help liking him, in spite of the rude way Mr. Kharapet heard him speak of me; and he has been looking wretchedly ill, poor man!"

"I am certain he never spoke rudely of you, auntie! I don't care what Mr. Kharapet said he heard, I am

certain Dr. Brooke never did."

With this parting shot Stasie walked out of the room, leaving Aunt Clem bewildered, with a sensation as though the earth had opened up before her, and there was no longer a firm foothold to be found any

Putting on her hat occupied Stasie longer than usual, and when she returned to the drawing-room she found her aunt ensconced in an easy-chair, in conversation with Brooke, who was standing on the hearth-rug. Fortunately Miss Stretton's back was to the door, so she did not see Stasie's sudden vivid blush, her change of expression, as her eyes fell upon the visitor. Her heart fluttered for a moment with a wild thrill, half joy, half fear.

"Going out, Miss Verner?" asked Brooke, advancing to meet her, with what she thought marvelous coolness and composure; but so soon as her hand was in his she recognized how thin was the seeming, when, feeling that he intervened between Miss Stretton and her niece, he laid his other hand over hers

in a mute caress.

"Yes," replied Stasie, a little unsteadily.

going to see Mrs. Harding!"

"Indeed! May I come with you? I find I shall have to go to Paris the beginning of next week, and I want to tell her my plans."

"Very well," said Stasie, still trembling with a "I will take Pearl; the children strange faintness.

like to see him."

"My love to Mrs. Harding. I am much too tired

to go out to-day," said Miss Stretton amiably.
"I want you to take a long walk with me, Stasie. I want to talk to you of a hundred things, and it seems years since I saw you yesterday," said Brooke, as soon

as they were clear of the house.

"And I want to talk with you so much," replied Stasie. "I have been miserable—no, not altogether miserable, but so restless and frightened. But I must ask Mrs. Harding to come with us."

"Very well," returned Brooke, after a moment's hesitation, and kept silence till the short distance was

accomplished.

Mrs. Harding was at home, and the children soon carried off Pearl to their special garden. Then Brooke told his cousin he was going over to Paris the following week for a short visit, and that he would not probably return to Sefton Park. "Indeed, you will all be flown by that time. I shall find you in town, 'eh, Livy?"

"Yes. We will move about the twentieth of next

month."

Then Stasie, a little timidly, asked Mrs. Harding if she would come out. Brooke, at whom Mrs. Harding glanced (feeling in some inexplicable instinctive way that he and Stasie understood each other), slightly shook his head, and Mrs. Harding answered quietly, "No, dear; I have a good deal to do today."

"There is not much time," remarked Brooke to

Stasie. "The evenings close in so soon."

Then Stasic found herself walking away down the avenue of elms, and soon turned into a path which led through a strip of woodland to the highroad.

"We are tolerably safe here," said Brooke, drawing her hand through his arm. "Now, let us talk over every thing, for we shall probably not have another

opportunity."

How long the memory of that day dwelt in Stasie's heart!—the crisp rustle of the withered leaves, the subtle perfume of the larch and pine-trees, the single note uttered at intervals by some bird not quite resigned to coming winter, the murmur of a little brook that prattled along its pebbly course near the path, as they walked to and fro beneath the sheltering trees; and Stasie felt all doubt and fear and hesitation melt away as she listened to Brooke's clear, decided statement of his well-defined plan, or wondered at the

amazing change in him from the cool, rather indifferent man of the world, to the eager, tender lover, whose controlled ardor testified to his care and consideration for her. He seemed to be years younger than when she first met him—blither, softer more genial.

"It is quite dusk," said Stasie at length. "I must not stay any longer." She was growing more at home with him, more deliciously familiar. "And there is one thing I should like to say to you, only I am half

afraid \_\_\_\_\_"

"Tell me every thing," interrupted Brooke; "every thought of your heart. You have no choice, my own

darling, but to trust me in all things."

"Don't you think, then," resumed Stasie, coming a little closer, "that we might manage to wait, if I staid with Mrs. Mathews, until you could get Mr. Wyatt's consent? I might refuse to leave—I can be very determined—and———— Oh! it is not that I doubt you, but I do shrink from a marriage of this kind, it seems so terrible. Is it not possible to man-

age in some other way?"

"Stasie, it is not possible!" returned Brooke impressively. "Believe me, you do not wish to avoid such an alternative more than I do. I would wait willingly for you, dearest, for months, rather than hurry you into such an undertaking, were it not that I feel convinced you will be safe only when you are my wife. Keep this before your mind, and let no hesitation disturb you. Have confidence in me: can you not believe that your safety, your welfare, are paramount with me?"

"I can, I will," said Stasie, moved and convinced; "only when—when every thing is settled, I must do something to make Aunt Clem comfortable for

life."

"You shall do what you like with your own, and I will help you."

"Ah! yes, I want your help so much, and"—a wist-

ful look into his eyes-"I do hope I shall get well and strong, and not trouble you with anxiety or sick-liness."

"My love," drawing her to him with infinite tenderness, "you shall be well and strong, and we shall enjoy life together; but if not, who can care for you and tend to you as I will. I take you for better, for worse."

Tears sprang to Stasie's eyes as she unconsciously

pressed close against him.
"I will see you home," said Brooke, "but we must part here," and clasping her in his arms he kissed her brow and eyes and lips, with more of passion than he had hitherto allowed himself to show.

### CHAPTER XXXVII.

The following day brought a joint letter from Mrs. Mathews and Ella. The former was greatly vexed that she could not take in her dear Stasie. Her house was already crammed, but Ella had a nice spare room, which was quite at Stasie's service; and Ella herself wrote a most hearty and loving invitation. Unfortunately she could not receive her friend till the following Wednesday.

Stasie would have liked to start the very next day. It was intolerable to her to be in hourly communication with her aunt, who was more than usually attentive and affectionate, and yet to keep silent respecting the thoughts that filled her brain to bursting, with joy

and fear and hope and pride.

Her only calm and happy moments were when Brooke was present, then a subtle warmth and strength seemed to fill her veins as with a potent, life-giving elixir, and she knew how her heart had elected

him as its mate, its other self, from the first moment they had met, though she had mastered its natural

cravings.

But Brooke was only occasionally at Sefton Park during the few succeeding days. He had gone back to stay in London, and the Rev. St. John Robinson was quite dull for want of his companionship. When Brooke did come, too, Stasie could rarely secure a few moments' private conversation with him. She never forgot the strange slowness, and yet awful rapidity, with which those intervening hours flitted away.

At length the last day but one was upon them; the last day but one before she would quit Mrs. Harding and Aunt Clem, never to return to them as Stasie Verner; for in spite of her repugnance to the course she was obliged to pursue, she felt it would be still more terrible if her marriage with Brooke were pre-

vented.

Brooke came in rather late in the afternoon. He looked bright, alert—like a man on the road to success—and made himself especially agreeable to Miss Stretton, too much so, for she persisted in remaining gracefully posed in her easy-chair, till Brooke began to think he must ask Stasie to come out with him, which he did not like to do, as it was raining heavily. Still nothing else was left for it, and he had just opened his lips to broach the subject when enter Mary with a note, "If you please'm, is there any answer?"

"Wait a moment," hastily opening it. "I hope the

messenger is not gone?"

"No'm."

"Then I shall just go and give him the answer myself. Stasie, dear, do you know where my receipt-book is?"

"I believe it is locked up in your Davenport in the

morning room," said Stasie falteringly.

Aunt Clem left the room briskly.

"Thank God!" ejaculated Brooke, starting up, and, coming over beside Stasie, took out his pocket-book, "tell me your address at C—, my darling, quick; care of the Rev. G. Baldwin, the College, C—" (writing quickly), "is that all? Then Stasie, you shall find a letter from me on your arrival giving you my address-you might let it be seen were I to give it to you here, and no clue must be given. Write to me the moment you arrive: I shall know no peace till I hear you are safe with your friends. How awfully you tremble! courage, my own love! in some ten or twelve days we shall be away. One thing more, lend me one of your rings, you shall have it again." He had only time to kiss the hand that gave it, and conceal the ring, when Miss Stretton sailed in again.

"I am sure, Dr. Brooke, you will excuse me. Our neighbor, Mrs. Morrison, wrote to beg the loan of my receipt-book. It was rather a liberty, but I could not refuse, and it was not in the Davenport, Stasie, it was

on the mantelpiece."

"I only waited your return to make my adieux," said Brooke. "I have to say a word to Robinson, then I must catch the five train."

"Good-by then, my dear sir. I trust you will enjoy

your visit to bright, beautiful Paris."

"I have no doubt I shall," said Brooke significantly.
"Have you any commands? The little Hardings have given me endless commissions. Good-by, Miss Verner; remember my advice—hope, and plenty of exercise. I expect to see you looking much better when we meet again."

A close pressure of her hand, and he was gone.

"He is quite right, Stasie, my dear; you should not despond about yourself. I am sure a change to

London will do all the good in the world."

"I think it will," said Stasie, smiling archly, though tears stood in her eyes; "and I earnestly hope I shall never give you any more trouble, auntie," kissing her. "Now I will go away and finish packing."

"Very well, dear! but you seem to me to be taking a great deal more than you will want."

"I do not think so, Aunt Clem."

Meantime Brooke was exchanging a few last words with his old schoolfellow; they had shaken hands when Brooke exclaimed, "I had nearly forgotten, will you take charge of this parcel?"—it looked like a couple of books tied up in brown paper—"till I come back, or I will write to you about it."

"Certainly, with pleasure."

"Good-by, old fellow! take care of yourself."

It was a gray lowering day when Stasie started for C—. She had felt faint and ill with the wild beating of her heart, which always filled her with uneasiness, the night before her departure. This greatly increased her intense desire to escape. A vague dim fear of poison was forming itself in her mind as the only solution of Brooke's hints and her own sensations; but she contrived to conceal her indisposition. Nothing, she was determined, should interfere with her journey.

Miss Stretton accompanied her to town. At Waterloo they were met by Kharapet, who escorted them to King's Cross, and was infinitely amiable, smooth, insinuating, yet Stasie shrank from him almost visibly. She read something sinister in his glance, something sneering and treacherous in his smile, nor did she breathe freely till the steam-whistle sounded, and she was

whirled away from her old life forever.

The quiet days, the rest, the sense of safety in Ella's simple happy home, were of infinite service in calming Stasie's excited nerves, and restoring tone to her spirits. At first Mrs. Mathews and her daughter were greatly distressed to see how pallid and worn she looked, to observe how readily her eyes filled with tears, and how violently she started at the least noise.

Gradually these symptoms disappeared, and Stasie grew more like herself, though restless, always wishing to be out of doors, watching for the postman, and constantly writing letters, which she preferred to post herself.

"Believe me, Stasie has more in her head than you think," said Mrs. Mathews to her daughter. "I never saw a girl so changed-indeed, I must say, improvedshe is so gentle and ready to hear reason, and thought-

ful. I am certain she is in love."

"Oh, no, mother! she would be sure to tell me!" "Don't you be too sure; look how she watches the

postman!"

Oh! the delight, the pride, the strength conveyed by those letters! It was worth being all that way away from him to have them! and how delicious, though puzzling, to reply, for Stasie never could bring herself to write honeyed phrases, but sought to veil her tenderness in playful conceits and saucy little quibbles, which sent many a thrill of joy through the heart of the reader as he noticed that her mind was regaining its tone.

On the whole a fortnight slipped away much faster than Stasie expected, and the moment of departure

had come.

"I do wish, dear, you could have staid just one week longer," said Ella, as she stood with her friend on the platform at the C--- station, whither Mrs. Mathews, Janet, and one of the younger boys had also come to speed the parting guest. "You are so very much better. You would have been quite yourself in a few days more."

"You have done me worlds of good indeed, but it would have been quite impossible for me to stay," returned Stasie, who was flushed and feverish. write to you, dear, as soon as I get to town, just to say I am safe. You must really come and see me when we

are settled in London."

Here the youngest Mathews boy came running up.

"Here are your stamps, Stasie, and the change; I

posted the letter all right.'

"Thank you, thank you. No, I don't want the change, keep it. Oh! here is the train. Good-by, Ella. Good-by, dear, dear Mrs. Mathews; I can never, never forget all your goodness to me," embracing her with tears.

"My dear, there was little I could do for you. Are

you sure your luggage was ticketed?"

"Yes! I saw to that," cried Fred, the third boy, proudly.

"They'll go all right, but she never put her name on the box."

"Good-by! Be sure you write!"

"Best regards to Mr. Baldwin; thank him for all

his kindness;" and she was off.
"Tell me, Tom," said his mother, as they walked slowly towards home, "how was the letter addressed that you posted for Stasie?"

"I dunno," said Tom. "I think there was Sefton

Park on it."

"Sefton Park!" repeated his mother; "that is strange, when she is going straight back there; it is very strange."

That lonely journey was probably Stasie's greatest trial, but there was ample compensation at the end of it, when Brooke, who had been on the watch for some time, opened the carriage door, and with a hasty whispered, "At last, my darling, at last!" assisted her to alight, and, drawing her hand through his arm, went to extricate her luggage. This was quickly accomplished, for the train was not crowded. Then Stasie felt as if all her troubles were over. She had in effect crossed the rubicon, and put herself beyond the region of doubt. She possessed that most precious gift that can bless the soul of woman, complete faith in the knowledge, wisdom, and honor of the man her heart prompted her to love, and she was with him now forever.

At Alma Terrace a vigorous preparation had gone on since morning. Brooke, after a week's residence, had announced the object of his sojourn. His landlady and her daughter showed the warmest sympathy. Indeed Brooke always got on well with women, and though he said as little as he could possibly help in explanation of the privacy he wished to maintain, both mother and daughter united in constructing a little romance highly creditable to the fascinating doctor if not to "his young lady."

It can therefore be imagined how delighted Stasie was to be welcomed by a portly, kindly, respectable-looking woman, who received her with much deference and evident sympathy; then Brooke, laughing gayly, called for Miss Hicks, and presenting her to his *fiancée*, said, "I flatter myself I have remembered most things, and I claim great credit in having provided you with a

bridesmaid.'

"Thank you, very much," said Stasie, whose color went and came with natural emotion, penetrated as she was by the tender thought shown for her by her lover, and she held out her hand to the pleased, smiling

girl.

A bright fire, plenty of flowers, a table laid for dinner, gave a gala aspect to the sitting room. Mrs. Hicks was ready to act as a motherly lady's-maid, and the terrible sense of being ashamed of herself began to be lifted from poor Stasie's heart.

"Well, she is a sweet young lady," was the judg-

ment pronounced on her down-stairs.

"She is indeed, mother. She is quite beautiful; any gentleman might want to run away with her. And isn't he fond of her! He looks years younger than he did yesterday."

"I am sure I hope they'll be happy," returned the mother with a sigh. "Now I have seen both, I am quite sure it must have been heartless brutes that came

between them! they seem just made for each other, but he is a good bit older than she is. I am glad I persuaded him to have a cake. I'm sure the young lady would have thought it a poor compliment not to have a cake! Here, 'Lisbeth, the fowl is done to a turn, get the tray quick. Love or no love, people must eat."

Up-stairs, when Stasie had removed her wraps and smoothed her hair, and come back to the sitting-room with a slight, graceful embarrassment, Brooke caught her hands in his, exclaiming, "Now let me have a good look at you after all these long weeks." There was nothing in the deep tender interest of his gaze to make it insupportable.

"I see you are nearly yourself again. My love! you have left all the ills, from which care and affection can shield you, behind, when you escaped that sneaking

devil Kharapet."

The evening passed quickly in talking over their

plans.

"Aunt Clem writes me word that she has taken a small house in Upper Baker Street," said Stasie, after a short pause, "and I fancy from what she says that Mr. Harding and Hormuz Kharapet have nearly quarreled over it. Hormuz would not agree to our having apartments, and Mr. Harding thinks the house too dear. Oh, Jim! what a frightful row there will be when every thing is found out!"

"I expect there will," returned Brooke philosophically: "but that will not matter much if we can keep out of the way for a fortnight or so, and I have had a letter posted for Robinson in Paris that will rather

throw them off the scent."

"You will never let any one take me away from you,

Jim?'

"I should like to see any one try," rather grimly.
"Do you know, I have had to do a bit of hard swearing for you. When I applied for the license, the fellow in authority—surrogate I think—asked about your

age, and the consent of your parents, etc. I said you were an orphan; fortunately he did not press me for particulars, and only warned me of the penalty I incurred if I married a minor against the consent of her protectors. I wish, Stasie, I could catch Wyatt before Harding and Kharapet get hold of him. But it is time for me to leave you; I want you to get a good night's rest. Good-night, my love, my own! this is our last parting." A long embrace, and, calling Mrs. Hicks, he enjoined upon her special care of the young lady before he went away to the hotel where he was to sleep.

The next morning they were married.

Meantime all went smoothly at Sefton Park. Mrs. Harding's removal to town had been delayed in consequence of Willie having taken a severe cold. Miss Stretton was briskly, cheerfully preparing for her own removal, highly pleased at the idea of being settled in town for the winter, and quite convinced by Kharapet's reasonings that a house and establishment of her own was much more suitable to Stasie's comfort and dignity than furnished lodgings. "The thought and consideration of that dear man is quite amazing," she observed to Mrs. Harding the afternoon of the day on which Stasie was married, as she walked with her towards Limeville, after a ramble through the rector's fields, all unconscious of the important event which had taken place that morning.

"He gives himself a good deal of trouble, and irritates Mr. Harding more than is necessary," replied his wife. "You would have been quite comfortable in

furnished lodgings."

"Perhaps so; but certainly a house is much more comme il faut. Ah! here is Mr. Robinson."

The incumbent raised his hat with his usual urbanity, and after an interchange of greetings, asked if Aunt Clem had good accounts of Miss Verner.

"Excellent, my dear sir; she writes in good spirits, and intends to remain another week. She asked, in her sweet way, if I could spare her a little longer as she was feeling so much better. Of course I told her to stay by all means, that I could manage our moving without her. This morning I had a few lines thanking me, and I imagine they are going to have company or something, for she says she will be much occupied, and that she will not write again this week."

"Very glad she is so much better, and very sorry we

are to lose her and you, Miss Stretton."

"By the by, have you heard any thing of Dr. Brooke? He has not written since he left," said Mrs.

Harding.

"I had a note from him a few days ago from Paris, asking me to send some books he had left at my place to his old lodgings, and he desired his kind regards to vou."

"Did he say when he was coming back?"

"No; there were not half-a-dozen lines in all."

"I dare say he may go on to Brussels. He has been wanting to see Brussels."

"He is a lucky fellow to be able to run about as he likes. Good morning;" and Mr. Robinson passed on.

There was some cleaning and white-washing to be done in the house selected by Miss Stretton, or, rather, by Kharapet, and the workmen were, as usual, procrastinating and provoking, so the days went past, and Miss Stretton grew impatient and weary of living half-

packed up, and far from comfortable.

"It is very wretched here," she said one afternoon more than a week after the above conversation, as she was parting from her friend Mr. Kharapet, who had been enjoying some of Bhoodhoo's best dishes, and bidding her adieu. I do wish you would call at the house-agent's and endeavor to hasten him. The Hardings will be away on Thursday, and I really cannot stay here alone."

"No; certainly not. We will hasten these lazy dogs. We will make our dear Stasie return to you."

"Indeed, I am astonished Stasie does not write, and, by the way, there was a letter for her this morning. I will send it on, and ask what she is about—"
"A letter for Stasie?" interrupted Kharapet, with sudden sharp curiosity. "Let me see it."
Miss Stretton obeyed. It was a ship letter, directed

in a straggling hand, and the envelope was of the commonest. It was, moreover, addressed to Mr. Harding's care, and had been readdressed by one of the clerks. Kharapet turned it over and over; his fingers itched to open it, but he dared not.

Returning it to Aunt Clem, he said gently, "Yes, dear lady, I would send it on at once, and beg her to fix a day for her return. I shall be here again the day after to-morrow, and hope to tell you that your new abode is ready. If you will write a few lines to Stasie I can post them in town."

Miss Stretton complied, and the Syrian carried off the epistle and its inclosure with him.

The next day but one Kharapet made his appearance at an unusually early hour. He wanted to consult Mr. Harding (who was not going into town that day) respecting some matter of business, and to return to the city before noon. But he found time enough to pause at Limeville, and give Bhoodhoo a private hint

that he had not yet breakfasted.

He was so early that Miss Stretton had not appeared above the visible horizon. She was not an early riser either by taste or habit. Kharapet therefore waited with what patience he could. He tried to read the paper, but in vain; his attention was engrossed by two letters which lay on the breakfast-table, addressed to Miss Stretton, one in a curious, left-handed looking writing, while the other, a thick packet, had the Cpostmark.

Presently Miss Stretton, arrayed in a "sweet" morning-cap and smiling a gracious welcome, entered.

"How very kind of you, dear Mr. Kharapet, to come in sans cérémonie! I hope Bhoodhoo has something nice for us."

"You are always well provided," with a bow; "but do not let me keep you from your letters," handing

them to her.

"Dear me! whom can this be from?" examining the smaller envelope. "I seem to know the hand, and yet I don't. 'N. E.,' I know no one in the N. E. district; but this, this is Mrs. Baldwin's writing," tearing it open in haste, and letting a letter fall out, whilst she glanced with changing color at a note inclosed.

"Oh, good gracious! What has become of her? Oh, read, read, Mr. Kharapet! my head is turning

round.''

Kharapet seized the paper with fierce eagerness, and

read—

"Dear Miss Stretton—Janet says she is sure the inclosed is from you. I therefore lose no time in returning it. I trust there is nothing wrong; but dear Stasie left us on the 28th, by the 12.30 train for King's Cross.—Yours very truly, Ella Baldwin."

Kharapet uttered an exclamation in some unknown

tongue, and then stood silent, paralyzed.

Miss Stretton burst into tears. "My dear child, my precious niece! She has been robbed and murdered,

and heaven only knows what."

"Bah!" broke out Kharapet furiously, for once natural and unrestrained. "Don't you see she is gone of her own free will. She has fled with some one and escaped—escaped!"

"I don't believe it, I can't believe it," cried Aunt

Clem

"Read this!" he exclaimed, in a tone of rude command, and he tore the other letter open for her.

"Ah!" cried Aunt Clem, "it is from herself;" and

she read-

"DEAR AUNT—I am well, safe, and happy.

"I don't believe it," sobbed Miss Stretton hysterically. "Some villain has forced her to write this with a pistol at her head!"

Kharapet did not heed her. He was closely examining the writing, the envelope, the signatures of

both letters.

"She never would go away with any one," continued Miss Stretton. "She did not care enough for

any one---"

"I must take these to Mr. Harding at once," interrupted Kharapet, who was greatly agitated, and even forgetful of his breakfast. "It is most mysterious. Hear me!" he said, harshly, roughly, to the weeping, trembling woman beside him, "Be silent in the matter. Do not let the household know. Should we discover and bring her back, their ignorance would make her return easier."

"I will not say a word," cried poor Aunt Clem, terrified and obedient. "But do wait for me. I will put on my bonnet in a moment. I can't stay here by

myself."

"You can follow," returned Kharapet, in the same abrupt savage tone; and gathering up the letters he crushed them into his pocket. Miss Stretton hesitated an instant, and then followed him into the hall, where she found him speaking rapidly and emphatically in Hindoostanee to Bhoodhoo, whose big dark eyes were alight with an expression of surprise and alarm. Neither noticed her; and when Kharapet ceased to speak, Bhoodhoo said something in reply—a few words—but ending in "doctor Sahib," at which Kharapet shook his head, and, with an exclamation went rapidly away.

### CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE morning meal at Sefton House was over. Mr. Harding had thrown down his table-napkin and taken up the Times, the children had gone for their morning run before settling to lessons, and Mrs. Harding's hand was on the door, as she was going to her diurnal interview with "cook," when Kharapet, pale, breathless, rushed in, nearly overturning Mrs. Harding in his onset.

"She is gone, fled, we know not whither!" he gasped, his face greenly white, his eyes flashing angrily, viciously.

"Who has gone? what's the matter? are you out of your mind, man?" exclaimed Mr. Harding, rising.

"Stasie!" cried Mrs. Harding, with a stunned feel-

ing, as if dazed by a sudden revelation.

Ah! yes, Stasie. You knew, did you?" cried

Kharapet, turning on her fiercely.

"I say, what the deuce is the matter?" said Harding, looking from one to the other, half angry, half bewildered.

"Here, read and understand," said Kharapet, spreading out the letters with trembling hands. "See what a devilish device! She, so proud, so cold, she has given herself to some beggar; she has refused me for some scoundrel who dared not ask for her openly. We will have her back, shall we not? and punish both. What is your law for such an offense, Harding? foolishness, I doubt not: a woman like that should not live;" and he suddenly burst into Hindoostanee, speaking with vehemence in broken sentences, gasping as if for breath between them, as though under the influence of furious passion.

Even Mr. Harding's attention was diverted for a moment from the papers before him. "Gad! you have lost your senses, Kharapet, you don't know what

you are talking about; pull yourself together, for this is a nasty business. Here, let me understand."

Thus admonished, Kharapet seemed to recover some of his habitual self-control, though his voice still trembled, and his tongue seemed parched. He explained how these letters had just arrived, and that the one inclosed had been forwarded to C— by Miss Stretton. Mr. Harding now began to peruse them, and his wife, thrilling with anxiety, leant over his shoulder as he had resumed his seat. Kharapet paced the room, striving to master his agitation.

"It is pretty clear then," said Harding, looking up, "that Stasie disappeared on the 28th, this day week, and has not since been heard of. Now she didn't go alone: the thing has been well planned. She has got a week the start of us; it will be devilish hard to track her; our only chance is knowing the train she traveled by. The guard may have noticed who met her. We must apply to the police. The question is, Who is the man? Have you any idea?" turning sharply on

his wife.

"I have no reason to suspect any one," she said nervously. "Could it be that-that Mr. Pearson?"

Mr. Harding shook his head. "He need not have run off with her. We could not have refused him if she consented; it would have been a suitable marriage." Kharapet murmured something. "No, that's not the man. Whom else did she know?" continued Harding, "your cousin Brooke, eh, Livy? He is unlikely to do any thing disreputable. He would have asked openly; no, it is some secret disgraceful affair." Here poor Miss Stretton came in, her bonnet awry, her shawl half off, and sinking on the sofa proceeded to drown herself in tears.

"I am convinced that the dear child had no attachment whatever; she was the essence of all that is modest and correct. She has been taken away by stratagem: I saw there was a dark man bent on work-

ing her evil."

"That is all trash," replied Harding rudely. "What do you think?" to his wife.

"I do not know what to think or whom to suspect, but I am afraid Stasie has gone of her own free will."

"At any rate, she has done for herself. We cannot break the marriage now. It's a devil of a business. You don't think it's Brooke's doing, do you?"

"It is the last thing I should accuse him of," cried Mrs. Harding warmly; "besides, he has been away in

Paris for quite three weeks."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Yes; Mr. Robinson had a letter from him from

Paris the other day."

"Send Robinson a line asking for the letter," cried Mr. Harding: "ask him to come up;" then, looking hard at his wife, "If I thought you had any hand in this, by —, you'd find out how angry I'd be."

In all her deep distress for her friend, Mrs. Harding remembered the task she had undertaken, and, looking straight into her husband's eyes, she said quietly and firmly, "I should do what I thought right, irrespective of vour anger. However, I can truly say that I have not the smallest reason to suppose Dr. Brooke

capable of such a breach of propriety."

Harding's eyes fell, and he then exclaimed, "Why, what dolts we have all been! Here, this letter may throw some light on the matter," and he picked up the one which had been returned to Miss Stretton, and unhesitatingly opened it. "By Jove!" he exclaimed in great surprise, "it is from that young scamp Mathews, and here's a bill on Grey, Hughes, and Co. for £15; it is dated from Shanghai." He proceeded to read—

"My DEAR STASIE—We are only just in port after a splendid voyage. Not a soul among the passengers afforded me an opportunity of proving my skill; but a couple of the crew were obliging enough to be ill, and I cured them first-rate. I have made friends with the captain, who has relations here, and they have asked me to stay with them. I am to draw my pay

to-morrow, so I'll send £15, as a first installment off my debt to you. I'm not good at sentiment, but I believe you've been the making of me, and I'll never forget it. You take care of yourself, Stasie, for you are an uncommon nice girl: don't you be imposed upon. I don't think much of that long-legged doctor; you've rather a fancy for him, or I'm much mistaken. I'll be right glad when I know you are safe out of the clutches of those greedy sneaks the executors. Wouldn't they like to pocket your cash and send you about your business, in spite of their white chokered respectability? I declare, if we were not so like brother and sister, I'd marry you myself, just to look after you. I have to write home, so must stop. God bless you! may you fall into the hands of as good a fellow as yourself is the prayer of yours ever,

"The vulgar, impudent, young blackguard," cried Mr. Harding indignantly, "What do you say to that, ma'am?" to poor Miss Stretton, as the most helpless object on which to pour the vials of his wrath. "There is a nice intimate for a young lady. I don't think we need doubt now about her being too delicate to run off of her own free will."

"I will .. ne .. ver give up my .. faith in that swe .. et girl," sobbed Aunt Clem, "though what is

to become of me, I know not."

"If you had looked after her a little sharper—"began Mr. Harding, folding up Bob's bill, and pro-

ceeding to put it into his pocket-book.

"Pardon me, Mr. Harding!" said Kharapet almost restored to himself at the sight of this appropriation, "I have the best right to that. I redeemed the jewels with my own money, and—you had better give it to me."

"Pooh, nonsense; we'll place it to the account, and

you can have your interest."

Kharapet objected, and a warm dispute would have raged had not Mr. Robinson been announced.

"I have just met your messenger, Mrs. Harding, and have come in to answer in person. Why, what is the matter?"

It was soon explained and the little man was deeply distressed. He was quite sure Brooke was not the partner of Miss Verner's flight, though he fancied his friend was a good deal impressed by that young lady's charms. As to the note, he had unfortunately torn it up. There was nothing in it, but he quite well remembered that the post-mark was Paris, October 28. After this came a great confusion of tongues, and Mrs. Harding at length avowed her leaning to the theory of Brooke being the delinquent. She thought his great anxiety about Stasie's health was more than that of an acquaintance; in short, she knew he would have gladly tried to win her, but feared she did not favor him; then the hint in Bob Mathews' letter, andshe could not tell why, but the conviction grew upon her, she had often thought Dr. Brooke unnecessarily alarmed about Miss Verner's health.

Kharapet turned many colors while Mrs. Harding spoke, and a silence ensued, broken by an occasional sob from Miss Stretton, who saw all her fair hopes of the future shivered and laid low. "I cannot believe Dr. Brooke guilty of such reckless impropriety," said Mr. Harding, "I think it more in that smart young Lancer's line. Let us send over to Hounslow and ascertain his whereabouts, and now there is nothing left but to put the matter into the hands of the police. The mischief is done; we can but do our best to save the property. You had better come with me, Kharapet."

That individual rose mechanically from the chair into which he had subsided—pale, limp, crest-fallen.

"Do, do take some refreshment, my dear sir," cried Miss Stretton, faithful to the last, "you have had a great shock, and you need support." But Kharapet was too far gone to heed any thing, till Mrs. Harding, struck by his exhausted look, seconded Miss Stretton's proposition. Then the gentlemen departed on

their rather hopeless errand, and Mrs. Harding kindly insisted on poor distracted Aunt Clem spending the rest of the day with her.

But the search was difficult; so much time had been

gained by the fugitive that her traces were lost.

Meantime the days flew fast for the newly-married pair. The strange sweetness of finding herself the object of passionate affection, and at length, bound by the ties of duty as well as preference, lent a new aspect to life in Stasie's eyes. Yet she could not feel quite at rest until all was known to the few friends she valued so highly, and more than once she hinted to her husband that it would be well to return to London and get through the bad quarter of an hour which awaited them, as quickly as possible.

But Brooke could not bring himself to curtail the

But Brooke could not bring himself to curtail the delicious interval by a moment. He had never dreamed of any thing half so delightful as this close and loving intercourse with a heart and mind so fresh, so keen to perceive, to enjoy, to learn, ready to look up to and believe in him, yet never losing their individuality. It seemed to bring back the brightness and vitality of his own boyhood, without lessening the strength and richness accumulated by matured na-

ture.

To avoid the roving English who abound at all times and seasons in Europe's fairest capital, Brooke had selected an old-fashioned hotel near the Luxembourg, where everything was thoroughly French. He himself often made excursions to the more cosmopolitan side of the Seine, to get books, English papers, etc., but Stasie kept out of sight in the old Fabourg.

One morning (for Brooke considered that the safest time of day) as he was leaving Gagliani's, intending to cross the Tuileries gardens to the bridges, he ran against a very English-looking Englishman — clean shaved, with snowy linen, and correct traveling costume. The gentleman started back and begged pardon. To Brooke's surprise he recognized Mr. Percy Wyatt. Our doctor was a man of prompt decision; he immediately raised his hat, saying, "Mr. Percy Wyatt, I think?"

"Yes," said that gentleman blandly; "I am sure I know you quite well, but at this moment I cannot remember your name."

"I have only had the pleasure of meeting you twice," replied Brooke, "and in your busy life you see so many that I do not expect you to remember me. I am a little better known to Lady Elizabeth. Allow me to introduce myself-Dr. Brooke, -th Dragoons."

"Very happy, I am sure." "Is Lady Elizabeth in Paris?"

"Yes, yes; we arrived in the night before last, from Istria. Most interesting country. We have had some very curious experiences! The abuses there are frightful, most frightful. I mean to expose them thoroughly."

"Ah! a fatiguing journey for Lady Elizabeth."

"No doubt, but her energy is amazing, quite amazing."

"I should like to do myself the honor of calling, if you think Lady Elizabeth would be disposed to re-

ceive me."

"Oh, certainly; by all means," said Mr. Wyatt, who was never quite certain of his ground among his wife's many favorites, and was not sure as to Brooke's standing. He might be the last A1; and at any rate there could be no harm in admitting a good-looking, well-bred man. "I am just returning to Meurice's (we always put up at Meurice's); come with me. She will be delighted to see you.

Brooke very readily complied.

Her ladyship was not in the little salon when they ascended to Mr. Wyatt's suite of apartments, and Brooke lost no time in opening up his subject.

"I want to ask Lady Elizabeth's permission to present my wife to her. We are here on our wedding trip."

"Oh, indeed! I was not aware. Very interesting,

I am sure."

"The fact is," resumed Brooke, "the young lady is an orphan and was rather peculiarly situated. Her guardian at a distance, a dangerous rival to be circumvented; so I persuaded her to dispense with consents, and escape with me."

"Indeed! Very romantic! very interesting! Lady Elizabeth will be deeply——Oh, here she is! My dear! this is a friend of yours—Dr. Brooke—who is anxious to know how you have borne the fatigue of

our adventurous journey."

"Ah! Dr. Brooke," said her ladyship graciously,
"I am very glad to see you! I am sure it is a marvel
that I am alive! I am going to write my experiences,
which I am sure Bentley will be delighted to publish.
I have made copious notes," etc., etc.
Brooke listened patiently with profound attention for

Brooke listened patiently with profound attention for nearly half an hour, at the end of which time her ladyship being exhausted for the moment, Mr. Wyatt put

in his word.

"Our friend here has been committing matrimony since we had the pleasure of seeing him—ran away with a young lady, to escape a dangerous rival! Quite a romance of the nineteenth century."

"How shocking!" cried Lady Elizabeth, with a winning smile. "I should not have believed it of you,

Dr. Brooke. I hope she has a large fortune!"

"I am not sure what she has, Lady Elizabeth. But I should like to insure your acquaintance and friendly offices. Your backing up would be of great impor-

tance, I need not say."

"Indeed! you overestimate my influence," cried Lady Elizabeth; "but such as it is it will, I am sure, be at your service when you have told me a few particulars."

"These you have a right to ask," returned Brooke, smiling. "My wife is an orphan, she has no near relative. Her guardian, a man of high position, who is necessarily almost a stranger to her, was away we scarcely knew where. She was persecuted by a man she did not like. The time of my return to my regiment was drawing near, so, with much difficulty, I persuaded her to run away with me."

Lady Elizabeth listened with deep attention, a light dawning on her as Brooke spoke. "Pray, are you not some relation of Mrs. Harding's?" she asked as he

paused.

"I am her first cousin."

"Then you have run away with Stasie Verner?" cried her ladyship, clasping her hands together.
"I have."

"With my ward! This is most extraordinary-most reprehensible—most—most—really, words fail me! And, great heavens! what an additional load of work and worry it will lay on my already overburdened shoulders. It is most inconsiderate, to say the least,

and-and-" cried Mr. Wyatt.

"My dear sir, do not worry yourself unnecessarily," said Brooke with quiet decision. "Stasie has been my wife for nearly three weeks. Nothing can undo that. Give your consent, and all difficulty will be at an end. Tie up my wife's fortune as you like, so long as she has the benefit of it, backed up by you, the executors cannot object, and you will find that in the end I have

saved instead of given you trouble."

Mr. Wyatt was much struck by the arguments adduced by Brooke, who proceeded to lay his own position and prospects before the philanthropic M.P. Lady Elizabeth, after some demur occasioned by backward glances to her favorite of last season, was caught by the glow of Brooke's language and the force of his representation. Both being mainly influenced by the fact that nothing now could undo the marriage; so at last Mr. Wyatt, having stipulated for the most

careful detail in the post-nuptial settlement, agreed to withdraw all opposition. Whereupon Brooke, determined to strike while the iron was hot, persuaded the guardian to write his consent, addressed to Mr. Harding, which Brooke accompanied by a friendly letter from himself.

Stasie had been wondering at her husband's prolonged absence, and even began to hope that nothing unpleasant had occurred, when he entered, looking so radiant that she sprang up to meet him, exclaiming,

"Who have you seen?"

"My darling," cried Brooke, throwing his arms round her, "sit down and write to Livy Harding and Aunt Clem as fast as you like. I have been spending the morning with Mr. Wyatt and Lady Elizabeth. He has not only given his consent, but written it; and that limb of Satan, the executor, is fairly checkmated."

With virtue rewarded and vice defeated, if not punished, the story ought to end. Very little remains to tell.

Of course the bride and bridegroom returned to London, to wait the conclusion of legal matters before

going to Italy for the remainder of winter.

Aunt Clem again retired into "furnished apartments," but they were neither mean nor uncomfortable; and she frequently observed to her female friends, of whom quite an agreeable circle gathered round her, "that a sweeter or more distinguished young creature than her niece, Mrs. Brooke, did not exist—and grateful too. She has never forgotten how faithfully I stood by her in very trying circumstances."

Mr. Harding found he had to reckon with a very friendly inquisitor when matters came to be investigated, and the little errors he had committed, in his efforts to enrich his young friend, were overlooked. On the whole, Stasie's fortune was nearly intact.

On one point Brooke was inflexible. He would not

permit Kharapet to enter his wife's presence. Indeed, he wrote what Kharapet told Miss Stretton in confidence was a most unchristian and uncharitable letter which, out of consideration to Stasie's husband, he (Kharapet) had destroyed. In short, the gentle Syrian thought it well to avoid his former beloved niece, and to find that pressing business demanded his presence in Bombay.

A few days before Dr. and Mrs. Brooke were to start on their southward journey, he was reading the Times after breakfast, when he uttered an exclamation, and called to his wife, "Look at this, Stasie!"

She came, and leaning upon his shoulder, read as

follows, under the head of "Police Intelligence:"

"Thames Street.-Inspector Moule of the C Division attended to explain to the magistrate the circumstances attending the death of a Hindoo, who was yesterday seized with strong convulsions in a lane near Wapping, and who died while being removed to the infirmary. The man was well dressed, and had a considerable sum-over fifty pounds-sewn up in his waistband. In a pocket-book was a certificate of good character, and a recommendation to captains of vessels trading to Bombay, of the bearer, Bhoodhoo, a native of that town, signed by Mr. Harding, a gentleman well known in the city, and Mr. Hormuz Khara-pet, whose interesting speeches in favor of extending English protection to the Christians of Syria, at the meeting in favor of that project, may be remembered. Epilepsy, conjoined with a weak heart, is supposed to have been the cause of death. The magistrate directed that the gentlemen above mentioned should be communicated with, in order to obtain their directions respecting the disposal of the poor man's money."

Brooke looked at his wife significantly, and said in a

low voice, "The dead tell no tales."

Stasie's lip quivered, and putting her arms round his neck, they exchanged a long, silent embrace.







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